EARLY INDIAN MOULDED TERRACOTTA

THE EMERGENCE OF AN ICONOGRAPHY AND VARIATIONS IN STYLE, *circa* Second Century BC to First Century AD

VOL I.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first comprehensive study of Indian moulded terracotta sculpture made between the second century BC and first century AD. Over 3000 images dispersed in more than 50 international collections have been studied. They hail from archaeological sites that spread from the Northwest Frontier in Pakistan through the Indian Gangetic plain to Nepal and Bangladesh.

While the stone imagery from sites like Bharhut, Sanchi and the Western Indian caves are reasonably well known, contemporary terracotta plaques have been marginalised by scholarship. Unlike their stone counterparts, the mass-produced terracotta plaques belong to a separate genre of cultic belief and patronage. Made of easily renewable and inexpensive clay, the use of these images was not precluded to the wealthier donors of contemporary stone sculpture, who were given mostly to patronising Buddhism or Jainism.

Before any hypothesis could be made about the religious affiliation of the terracotta images, the first objective of this study was to collect the data, and categorise it empirically. In this process, a pattern of related similarities and differences emerged in the imagery. A stylistic study has also been conducted that compares the inter-regional relationships between the sculptures from five areas: the Northwest, the Indo-Gangetic Divide, Upper-Gangetic Valley, Middle-Gangetic Valley and Bengal. This study revealed a complex and shared iconography of images spread over the South Asian Subcontinent before the Common Era.

However, identifying their iconography and nature of the cult(s) that used these images can only be speculated at this stage. A preliminary study has shown that the closest textual descriptions that mirror the iconography of these images lie embedded in the later myths of the major Indic divinities. It appears that the myths and magico-religious nature of pre-Kuṣān

divinities were subsumed by the mythologies of the emerging 'great' gods like Shiva, Vishnu and Devi.

These images form perhaps the first clear iconographic programme of sculptures found in the Subcontinent. This leads us to assess what factors (religious, ritualistic, economic and artistic) might have influenced the sudden creation of this imagery in India. Finally, in so doing, this dissertation questions who would have used this imagery, and why. The thesis concludes that many Indian gods and goddesses, epic narratives and their heroes, often forgotten by the subsequent tradition, found their first visual reference in Early-Historic terracotta. It also highlights the important ritualistic and apotropaic function of early images.

The vast majority of this material has never been published. Approximately 450 illustrations accompany the dissertation.

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1. The commonly used transliteration system has been used for words from Indic languages.

Vowels	a	Ā	i	ī	u	ū
	e	Ai	O	au	am/am	aḥ

Consonants	Unvoiced unaspirated	Unvoiced Aspirated	Voiced Unaspirated	Voiced aspirated	Voiced Nasals
Guttarals	k	Kh	G	gh	N
Palatals	c	Ch	j	jh	ñ
Linguals	t	Th	D	dh	N
Dentals	t	Th	D	dh	N
Labials	p	Ph	B	bh	M

Semi-vowels	y	R	l	V

Spirants	ś	ṣ	s	ḥ

2. For place names however, sites have been transliterated as they appear in Modern Indian usage and in most maps. So 'Sanchi' instead of 'Sāñci' and 'Lomas Rishi' instead of 'Lomas Rsi'. In the case of Panjab, when referring to the modern Indian state, the current spelling of 'Punjab' has been used, however, when referring to the region (which encompasses both Indian and Pakistani territories) I have used Panjab.

3. The names of Indian gods and specialist terms have been transliterated using the system given above, except in the case of those words which feature in most English dictionaries, as in the case of Vishnu, not Viṣnu, Shiva, not Śiva and Krishna, not Kṛṣna.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Thousands of terracotta images dated between 200 BC and AD 100 have been found in excavations and from the surface of ancient sites in India. These are mostly in the nature of thin moulded plaques fired to a buff - red colour. They show a complex arrangement of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures and are often highly decorative. This is a comprehensive study of these images from five broad geographical divisions within South Asia.

There has been much speculation on the nature of the perishable arts of India that must have held the secrets of the great cultural and artistic efflorescence under the Kuṣānas in second century AD. This dissertation is concerned with one of those perishable media that has surprisingly received little scholarly attention. Contemporary Buddhist imagery from the famous stupas of Sanchi and Bharhut however, which is usually made of stone, has been studied ever since the inception of the discipline of Indian art-history. The terracotta images however, are not necessarily Buddhist, Jain or Hindu. Made of easily available clay, and pressed out of moulds, these were popular images, not precluded to wealthy, literate donors. The images are also strikingly similar all the way from the Northwest Frontier to Bengal. They exhibit one of the earliest organised patterns of anthropomorphic iconography in South Asia.

Who were the patrons of this prolific imagery? Who are the divinities themselves? What was the nature of the cult(s) they expressed? Why were they selected for visual expression in this period alone? And how were they transformed, if they survived at all, in the subsequent tradition of Indian imagery? Questions such as these have no immediately available answers. In order to be able to address them at all, images had first to be collected, a visual text established and individual details noted. Only through the empirical creation of a database could there be a foundation for any subsequent interpretation of the relationship between individual units. This involved extensive fieldwork across South Asia, a survey of

archaeological sites and photographing over 3000 images in India and abroad – A task that formed one of the foundations of this study. An attempt has been made to address these issues towards the end of this dissertation.

This chapter itself has two parts. The first provides a brief political and historical introduction to the regions addressed further in this work. The latter sets this study within the context of previous scholarly exercises in the field.

Chapter 2 provides a brief historical survey of imagery in South Asia prior to the post-Mauryan period that might have influenced the early-historic terracotta plaques. In studying both the stylistic and iconographic predilections of proto-historic and early-historic periods, we are able to contextualise post-Mauryan terracotta within their antecedent traditions and also determine how the images studied here mark a stylistic, iconographic and technological break from previous imagery.

Since the images are not easily identifiable, and have never really been examined as an interrelated body of evidence, Chapter 3 tries to collate and order a large corpus of this data. The chapter is broken into 5 geographical units: The Northwest, the Indo-Gangetic Divide (Haryana and Panjab), Upper-Gangetic Valley (concentrated mostly in UP), the Middle-Gangetic Valley (modern Bihar and the Nepali Terai) and the Lower-Gangetic Valley (Bengal and Bangladesh). By comparing the material from a huge geographical area, we are able to note which iconographic and stylistic features persist throughout the Subcontinent and contrast those with ideas that are region or site specific. I have selected those pieces for discussion that might best highlight the typical style of a region and its iconographic variety. As far as possible, the pieces come from documented excavations, archaeological collections and museums. The chapter also focuses on the archaeology of 25 representative sites. This forms a background against which the material can be understood, providing some framework for dating and contextualising the pieces.

The penultimate chapter 4 attempts to interpret this data, by trying to ascertain what were the motivating factors for creating this imagery, how that was visually achieved, and what sort of impact it might have had on subsequent Indian art. The first quest of this chapter however, is to establish the applicability of the words 'iconography' and 'religious / cultic imagery' to early Historic terracotta plaques. Not only is it found that this is one of the first systematised iconographic programmes of South Asia, it is executed through a method of visualisation that endures to date in India. The second part of the chapter tries to determine what special historical and religious forces might have been active in the period between 200 BC and AD 100 to engender this imagery. The chapter comments on the important role of ritual and festivity in Early India. Finally the chapter concludes, with suggestions and lines for ongoing research that are likely to yield more conclusive results as to the identity of the figures.

The conclusion of the dissertation in Chapter 5 comments on the uses that the images may have been put to, and moreover by whom they might have been used. It also summarises the research undertaken in the rest of the work.

The Appendices at the end of the work provide a list of collections and sites studied and a discussion on the topical and urgent subject of fakes and forgeries in post-Mauryan terracotta. Volume 2 contains maps and illustrations that supplement this work.

A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY

The general political history of the period immediately succeeding the Mauryas is inconveniently problematic. Riddled with long genealogies of kings from a list of dynasties that do not add-up, we are not in a position to read the chronology of the period with any degree of accuracy. The dynastic lists have been construed from those mentioned in textual, inscriptional and numismatic sources.[1] Several textual sources confirm that the suzerainty of

[1] The literary sources for the period include, in addition to the Buddhist and Jain works, several other references, such as, the Arthaśāstra by Kautilya, Harṣacarita by Bāna , Kathāsaritsāgara by Somadeva,

Magadha passed from the Mauryas to the Śungas with the murder of the last Mauryan emperor, Brhadratha, at the hands of his own Commander-in-chief, Puṣyamitra. In the *Harṣacarita*, Bāna says that the murder took place under the pretext of a military display.[2] However both the lineage of Puṣyamitra and the names and order of his successors is controversial.[3] In fact, there is a controversy about whether Puṣyamitra was a Śunga himself. While the Purānas call the family concerned Śunga, the *Divyavadāna*, *Mālavikāgnimitra* and the *Harṣacarita* do not. The controversy is heightened in the case of Puṣyamitra's successors. The first names of most of these 'Śunga' kings ends with 'Mitra' (such as Puṣyamitra, Agnimitra, and so on) and while this may just be a convention for their names, we do know that there were at least a few other groups of kings who also used the same convention. Were these different groups related? Many of the 'Mitras' are referred to in general history books as a separate dynasty. Then, was Puṣyamitra's lineage 'Śunga' at all?[4]

On the subject of related and contemporary kings, we know that Agnimitra, Puṣyamitra's son seems to have been made the viceroy of Vidisha during his father's reign itself. It is also possible that other relations were entrusted with the rule of other parts of the former Mauryan Empire. This seems to be the only reasonable way to explain the extraordinary numbers of kings that we know of for this period; for if we followed the Purānic lists and added up all their reigns, we find ourselves with at least 250 yeas of history, when the period we are addressing

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Mālavikāgnimitra by Kālidāsa, Mahābhāṣya by Patañjali, Aṣtādhyāyī by Pānini, Vedas, (Gārgi Samhita), Purānas, Jātakas, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhagvadgita.

[2] *"Prajñadurbalam ca baladarśanavyapadeśadarśitāśeṣa-sainyaḥ senānīranāryo mauryam brhadratham pipeśa puṣyamitraḥ svāminam"*; Harṣacarita, ed. Führer, p. 269.

[3] For an overview of the controversies involved, see H. C. Raychaudhuri, *IC* III, p738-740; KAN Sastri 1957, p. 95 – 115.

[4] In addition to the confusion with the name 'Mitra', in Kālidāsa's work, *Mālavikāgnimitra* (iv, 14), the family is referred to as 'Baimbika'. See *Comprehensive History of India, op. cit.* p. 95, fn. 4. Several debates also surround the status of the Śungas within the Indian caste structure. As the Buddhist sources have presented Puṣyamitra as a persecutor of their religion, added to by the evidence from various sources that he performed Vedic sacrifices; it is alleged that this was a period of "Brahmanic revival". The historians who support this view tend to present the Śunga family as Brahmin. Others have said that they must be Kṣatriya, as Puṣyamitra was a general in the Mauryan army. These arguments have been buttressed by elaborate discussions on their specific *'gotra'* and the Vedic seer from whom they might have descended. While none of these debates concern us here, see a discussion on this aspect in H C Raychaudhuri, *ibid.* and also Chaudhury, NK 1987, pp. 9- 13. The latter stresses, through literary references, that Puṣyamitra adopted the name 'Śunga' which was the *gotra* of his *Purohita*, and hence we have the *Brahmana* suffix to his name. He himself was, according to Chaudhury, a *Kṣatriya*.

is only about 170 years long![5] Besides, the list of kings in one text does not necessarily mirror the list in another.

The Śunga kingdom was not nearly as centralised or as large as the Mauryan, and many local rulers tried to establish their own dynasties with varying amounts of success. They originally controlled most of the Gangetic valley and some parts of northern/eastern India. Within a century, however, their rule had diminished to control only around the area of Magadha and Vidisha. Many of the newly emergent dynasties minted their own coinage which are our principal source in reconstructing the history and reigns of these regional kingdoms from the end of the second century BC to the early decades of the first century AD. In about 72 BC, Śunga rule was overthrown by the Kanvas even in Magadha. The Kanvas ruled only until 27 BC when a raid by the Āndhras deposed them. However, the Āndhras seem never to have dominated the history of Magadha and its environs, their possessions being concentrated in Central, Deccan and Western India.

The ancient kingdom of Kalinga, in the region of modern Orissa and parts of Andhra Pradesh, had a long history of trying to retain, and when lost, reassert their independence from Magadha. Their wars with Aśoka are too well known to be mentioned here, besides, their dates precede the period with which we are concerned. Seizing the opportunity of declining 'imperial' Mauryan control at Magadha, Khāravela founded line of dynasts for Kalinga. The main document for this remains the Hathigumpha inscription in a cave at Udaigiri hill near modern Bhuvaneshwar. The dates for the career of King Khāravela are debatable. We have inscriptional and textual references that present him as a powerful '*Cakravartin*' monarch, who led several expeditions to Anga and Magadha. He brought much booty back to Kalinga, built several temples and was, personally, perhaps a Jain.

The coinage in the Kosala region gives us different lists of kings in the region of Ayodhya. Many of them have names which end with Datta, Deva or Mitra who were all active in the

region until the end of the first century BC. The area seems to have been unified thereafter by the Kuṣānas in the first century AD, who ruled it for at least a century until the second century AD when the indigenous coinage starts resurfacing. The kingdom of Panchala, centred on Ahichhatra had a similar history with a number of minor kings who were related probably to those ruling in Kaushambi. Kaushambi appears to have broken off from Magadhan overlordship quite early in the second century BC itself as evidenced through the coins of a king that bear the legend '*Bahasatimitasa*' in early Brahmi. To whom this legend refers, or to which dynasty the person may belong is not clear. Equally inconclusive is the evidence from Mathura, where another two dynasties seem to be active around the same time: The Mitras (Brahmamitra, Drdhamitra, Sūryamitra and Viṣnumitra) and the Dattas (Puruṣadatta, Uttamadatta, Rāmadatta, etc.). Mathura was conquered by the Śakas in approximately 75 BC, and remained subject to several incursions from the Indo Greeks until the Kuṣānas, also from the Northwest appear to have lent the region some political stability for about 150 years until the end of the second century AD. Other even smaller monarchies and republics like the Arjunāyana south west of Mathura and the Śibis at Chitor and Tambavati Nagari are also known.

One of the major reasons for the quick dynastic successions and general political upheaval in the region was on account of the repeated forays being made into the Gangetic valley by various Indo-Greek kings. The Bactrian Greeks, the successors of those Greek generals who had initially come with Alexander had established their own kingdoms and declared themselves independent of the Seleucid Empire. In the early part of the second century BC Demetrius came to occupy most of the Indus valley and Panjab and used it as a base to raid the Gangetic valley. But the "*Yavanas*" (as the Greeks/foreigners from the west were called) were ridden with infighting themselves, and the Northwest, Panjab, Indus valley came under the rulership of different Greek kings. In the second half of the second century BC, the western part of Indo-Greek dominance was taken over by the Parthians. The Greeks were therefore restricted to Afghanistan and India. Also, by the middle of the second century BC,

[5] For instance, the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmānda Purānas* say that Puṣyamitra reigned for 60 years, other

the Yueh-Chih had started moving westwards from China to the Caspian Sea. The Scythians who had settled in this area were displaced and moved first into Parthian territory in Iran and then to Indo-Greek areas in India. By the first century BC, they ruled as far as Mathura. None of these kingdoms, however, ever assumed the nature of an over-arching empire, and smaller kings and chiefs continued to rule in pockets all over the area.

The indigenous kingdoms in the region of Panjab, lying en route for the eastward movement of the North-westerners assume an interesting, hybrid history that is reflected in their artistic oeuvre. As far as the political history is concerned, the principal local states in the region included the Audumbaras, Kunindas, Trigartas, Yaudheyas and the Agastyas. Once again, the history of these states is dependent on their coins. The extent of influence of these states extended into modern western Panjab in Pakistan, the Indian states of Punjab, Haryana and the western and southern parts of Himachal. Often the coins in this region are inscribed on the obverse in Brahmi, while the reverse carries a Kharoshti legend. Clearly, being in the middle of an ancient transit zone, these are features only to be expected. These states seem to have been active from the late second century BC to the end of the first century BC, whence their power declined before the various Indo-Greek incursions and particularly in the wake of the arrival of the Kuṣānas in the area. However, Kuninda and Yaudheya coinage was quick to resurface with the decline in Kuṣāna power at the close of the second century AD.

Living as a significant force in Central Asia and north west India was the tribe led by Kujula Kadphises, i.e. the Kuṣānas, who became not only the dominant tribe of the Yueh-Chih, but also fought the Pahlavas who had come to control the north west. The Kuṣānas began a separate period in art history.

In short, the Mauryas we know came to power around 321 BC, and produced a wide range of art works which had varying amounts of stylistic continuity with their successors in the terracotta of the following period. The same following period, being one that began around

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Purānas usually say 36 whereas Jain sources say 30.

183 BC when Puṣyamitra, a General in Magadha, was able to overthrow his Mauryan monarch, and establish a line of local rulers called Śungas. These Śungas seem to be related to a wide range of other potentates, some even local rulers, who were spread across most of middle and eastern India. Some of these associated kings went with dynastic names like Mitra, Datta and Kanva. There were other kings also known around the same time who may not have been related to the above group such as the Yaudheyas and Āndhras, to name but two. Meanwhile the North-West had its own vicissitudes. The kings of this region were all engaged, either directly with incursions into mainland India or were at least very closely affected by their neighbouring states' fortunes in India. We are left therefore with no clear continuous historical narrative. As Romila Thapar says, "the second century BC saw the subcontinent divided into a number of political regions, each with its own ambition. On a superficial view there seems to have been no connecting theme. Yet there was a theme even though it was not apparent in political events."[6] Art was one of those expressions in unity. The surprising evidence of a clear stylistic unity over a broad geographic area: from Panjab to the Deccan bears testimony to this. Moreover, this unity is across different media: i.e. stone, terracotta, and the occasional wooden, gold, ivory or bone sculpture.[7]

Immediate Post-Mauryan India saw the decline of Empire and the proliferation of a series of short-lived, factious states that wielded power over relatively small areas. Yet, there was a distinct and well-developed sculptural style which spanned northern South Asia - from Bangladesh, through the Ganges valley, Nepal, Western India, Panjab to the Indus valley and some sites further west. This style has been loosely termed "Śunga", after some dynasties by that name.

The cultural fabric of the whole region then, is one of a deep integration of a wide range of cultures. No clear history can be created for this period, but a few influencing factors can be

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[6] Thapar, R. 1966 (1990 reprint), p 92

culled, and can help us in reconstructing at least some basic points to remember. Several dynasties were active in this period, many coterminous with one another, some of them apparently even related. By about mid to late first century AD these dynasties started losing their influence under the increasing influence of the Yueh-Chihs or Kuṣānas as they came to be known. The Kuṣānas arrived when the process of giving colour and form to the general artistic repertoire of India was already well on the way. The varying influences from the Iranian Greek, Roman and innumerable Indian "folk" and "courtly" religious and artistic expressions were being amalgamated. The terracotta reliefs studied here, constitute one of the most prolific of those pre-Kuṣāna art forms. However, clubbing them all under the general term 'Śunga', as is current in scholarship is misleading and causes several problems. These will become apparent further in this study.

AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

The historiography of Indian antiquities made between 200 BC and AD 100 is bedevilled with an exceptionally strong Buddhist bias. When addressing this period, it is the stone reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi, the Western Indian caves and Amaravati that remain the concerns of most art historical works to date. The lack of attention paid to the non-Buddhist, and the antiquities not made of stone, has presented us with an incomplete picture of the nature of early Indian material culture and religion.

[7]This of course brings into question once again, the entire notion of Mauryan art being the expression of a centralised imperial empire, dictated from Pataliputra. Post-Mauryan India is marked by a number of small states, no political cohesion, yet tremendous, distinctive artistic unity.

The attention to Buddhist antiquities of the period began in the nineteenth century, and formed one of the primary concerns of Indology.[8] Cunningham's rediscovery and use of Buddhist pilgrims' accounts like Fa Hsien and Hiuen Tsang, became a most influential basis on which archaeological sites were explored and excavated. His resultant 'geography' of ancient India, was not so much an actual exploration of the Subcontinent, but one refracted through a selective utilisation of Buddhist sources.[9]

Cunningham was not of course alone in seeking a Buddhist past. The division of Indian history, culture and archaeology along religious lines was one of the first features of nineteenth century colonial history writing.[10] This was at times contrived deliberately, and at others, since it had already become common parlance, was a convenient paradigm within which subsequent scholarship could be situated. The terracotta images discovered at these excavations did not necessarily show an iconography that was Buddhist, and would not have fit into the neat division of Indian history's 'Buddhist Period'. Besides, crude objects made from clay were hardly 'high art', and therefore not considered worthy of the same academic attention.

Even when considering the more anthropological subjects of 'Tree and serpent worship', Fergusson looked towards the Buddhist remains to reconstruct Indian religion and history.[11]

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[8] A number of general historiographical surveys of Indian art history have mentioned the issues raised here. See, Guha-Thakurta, T. 1998 pp. 26 – 58; Chakrabarti, DK 1988; Chandra, P 1983, pp. 39 – 80, Mitter, P. 1977.

[9] Chinese versions of place names were related to their closest Sanskrit ones, and the Sanskrit ones to specific sites and monuments which were then selected for exploration. Cunningham, A. 1871, (reprint: 1963). Chakrabarti has shown how exposing a Buddhist past to India's religious identity, underplayed 'degenerate' Brahmanism's role as the paramount religion of India. In highlighting a parallel and sanctioned counter-religious movement in India's past, the proselytising nature of nineteenth century Christian missionary activity in the Subcontinent was merely reinitiating a 'civilising' process that had been successfully attempted on Indian soil two millennia earlier. The 'Buddhist period' revealed to Cunningham a strong India, united spiritually and temporally, just as India could be under the British Empire.Chakrabarti, DK 1988, pp. 43-4, 51.

[10] Indian history was divided into Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim Periods. A classification system that has successfully misled scholarship for two centuries. Each period pretends to exclude the activities of other religious communities, and more importantly, imposes a single unifying identity to a multi-cultural landmass. All the more unfortunate, is the forced pan-Indic identity is founded in religion, as if that were the single most defining or characterising element of Indian thought, polity or history. Undoubtedly, in art-history where only religious imagery is being considered, the classification is valid. A significant part of general art-historical writing however, is still divided along religious lines.

[11] Fergusson, 1868.

Buddhism had an added appeal for the art historian: It's visual expression in the Northwest derived from artistic ideals founded in late Hellenistic imagery which was for most European scholars, so much closer to 'art' than the 'monsters' of India. This approach fuelled one of the greatest debates in Indology - to determine whether the image of the Buddha was created under Hellenistic or Indian influence.[12] The controversy obscured investigation into a related theme: the origins of anthropomorphic iconography in India. Perhaps the greatest disservice to the history of Early Indian sculpture came with the inadvertent link between the origins of anthropomorphic iconography and the creation of the image of the Buddha. The Buddhist period had already been ensconced as the period of the earliest expression of Indian art, and when studies in the origins of Indian iconography began to rise, they looked towards this period first. Naturally the image of the Buddha himself would be the most important figure in the Buddhist period. His origins had the added fascination for Europeans as it seemed likely that the first anthropomorphic divinity of India (recognisable to date) had been created in Gandhara under Hellenistic influence. The study of iconography which began to grow in the twentieth century focussed its attention on Buddhist deities. Here too, the first work on the subject by Albert Grünwedel in 1893 (English translation 1903)[13] was concerned with Buddhist imagery, principally from Gandhara, that was later expanded by Foucher.[14] Non-Buddhist iconography was first taken on in a monumental work by TA Gopinatha Rao in 1914.[15] However, it was not till JN Banerjea published 'The Development of Hindu Iconography' in 1941, that a chronological framework was suggested for the evolution and types of iconography.[16] Although Banerjea took in his purview 'minor' antiquities he did not have all the material evidence we have access to today. Banerjea's principal concern was to seek the origins of the iconography of Indian divinities known to us either through texts or those still available for worship. This thesis however, aims to dispel the assumption that the rise of anthropomorphism in Indian imagery was heralded by early Buddhist art alone. Instead, it

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[12] See for instance the views of Foucher 1905, 1918 and 1923 and Coomaraswamy 1927 (c).

[13] Grünwedel, A.: 1903.

[14] Foucher: 1905, 1918 and 1923.

[15] Rao, TA Gopinatha: 1914 – 16.

aims to show that a complex variety of social and religious ideas were current, which allowed the gods in the terracottas to be expressed through a developed iconographic programme. Even though we do not know who these gods are, and we have not yet been able to find any text that details their iconographic particularities, they remain one of the earliest expressions of anthropomorphic deities in India.

The majority of terracotta images produced between 200 BC and AD 100 do not necessarily conform to any 'known' religion or cult and their worship (barring a handful of exceptions) does not seem to have continued into the subsequent traditions of Indian religious art. Yet, with their consistency in style and iconography variety, and their prolific presence across North India, surely, in seeking the origins of anthropomorphic imagery in South Asia, these images warrant greater scholarly attention.

The first serious study of terracotta sculpture, that attempted to incorporate them within the oeuvre of mainstream Indian art, was conducted by Coomaraswamy. His first in depth studies were made in two articles, "Archaic Indian Terracottas"[17] (1928) and "Early Indian Terracottas"[18] (1927). By taking a broader view of early Indian art and studying it in totality, his conclusions possess an insight lacking in much subsequent writing. In 1927, in his seminal work *Indian and Indonesian Art*, Coomaraswamy was the first scholar to study terracotta images as part of the entire artistic output of India along with stone sculpture.[19] His path breaking studies on the importance of the early cults of *Yakṣa*s demonstrated the importance of examining pre-Christian autochthonous cults in seeking the origins of Indian iconography and artistic expression.[20] He said, "If popular belief thus contributed a large element to the personalities of the Gods as they came to be imagined, it can hardly be doubtful that popular

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[16] Banerjea, Jitendranath: 1941 (2nd enlarged and revised edn. 1956).

[17] Coomaraswamy: 1928 (reprint 1977).

[18] Coomaraswamy, 1927 (b): pp.90-91.

[19] There are repeated references that compare post-Mauryan terracotta with Bhaja and Sanchi. Coomaraswamy, 1927 (a): p 28, 36.

[20] Coomaraswamy, 1928 (reprinted 1971) and 1927(c).

religious art, of which the early terracottas and the Mathura railing pillars may be cited as examples, made large contributions to the iconography of the ultimate pantheon. What we see taking place in Indian art towards the beginning of the Christian era is not so much the creation of a brand-new iconography as the adaptation of an older iconography to new requirements and the giving of a new and deeper content to time honoured forms."[21]

Yet, curiously, most published work after Coomaraswamy's writings tend to be in the form of brief articles and as parts of archaeological reports. Most of these publications are also largely specific to a site and rarely to a region, and barring the work of Kramrisch, almost never broad enough to encompass all of South Asia. Few broad historical surveys have been carried out to interpret these figurines and try and study them in terms of continuity in style and iconography, not only in its own medium (terracotta) but also, to try and treat it as an integral part of the artistic expression of ancient India and compare it to stone and other sculptures.

This is perhaps because of the inherent and irresolute problems that the subject poses and also because the medium terracotta has not been considered "high art". The sheer quantity of the material excavated in recent years is also overwhelming. Terracotta objects receive a mixed reaction from art-historians and archaeologists – thousands of ancient fragments are recovered in excavations, and they are looked upon as either the nemesis of the excavation that must unfortunately be labelled, catalogued and relegated to the stores of some local site museum, or, rarely, when they are of some artistic merit, feature in a publication by the more enthusiastic of scholars.

Apart from Coomaraswamy, it must, however, be pointed out that Kramrisch, V S Agrawala and S C Kala have made significant contributions to our understanding of post-Mauryan terracotta. V S Agrawala's earliest publication on *Mathura Terracottas* was published in 1936[22] (reprinted 1984). This was followed by a catalogue of the sculptures in the then "Curzon

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[21] *Op. cit.* 1927(a) p. 46.
[22] Agrawala, VS: 1936: p.6-38.

Museum, Muttra", in 1939. Agrawala's command over Sanskrit sources allowed him to interpret the iconography of the terracottas. He showed how the concept of the divine female, the Earth Mother, is closely affiliated to all other depictions of the feminine in early Indian terracotta. His work on two other important sites, were published as articles: *Rajghat Terracottas*[23] in 1941, and *Terracotta Figures of Ahichhatra*,[24] published first in 1948 and reprinted in 1985. While the stratigraphy of Ahichhatra is not entirely reliable, it remains one of the few sites where terracottas have been found in a formal documented excavation. The site has revealed, as far as 'Śunga' material is concerned, a large number of *'Mithuna'* or *'Dampati'* type plaques. In addition, two more articles, *'Vasudhārā'* in 1939[25] and another on a terracotta plaque from Rajghat,[26] have all been pioneering studies. Agrawala also provided, based in some measure on the writings of Coomaraswamy, a chronology of Indian terracotta sculpture. However, his iconographic attributions for the plaques (such as *'Dampati'*, *'Vasudhārā'* and others) have been subsequently questioned.[27] It is unlikely that the texts he referred to provided an immediate context for the deities in terracotta. Even if they were, many of his iconographic appellations are now understood to be later developments in Indian art, which are unlikely to have been expressed as early as the post-Mauryan period. Individual cases discussing these iconographic types are to be found in Chapters 3 and 4.

Agrawala's writings were also specific to a site or a group of sculptures confined to the Upper-Gangetic Valley. By considering a larger number of comparative sites and pieces, his chronology too, can now be refined. These issues are dealt with in subsequent chapters in the present work.

Stella Kramrisch is known to have had a particular interest in 'Unknown India', the arts of village India, and those classes of antiquities that would at the time have been considered

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[23] Agrawala, VS: 1941: p.1-8.

[24] Agrawala, VS: 1948.

[25] Agrawala, VS: 1939 (b).

[26] Agrawala, VS: 1953.

more for their anthropological interest than artistic merit.[28] She made a distinction between 'timeless' and 'timed' terracottas in 1939.[29] The timeless ones being those forms and styles that remain broadly the same over hundreds and in some cases even thousands of years. The latter are those which are influenced by historical factors like patronage, style, geography, period, philosophical changes, etc. The post-Mauryan terracotta plaques studied in this dissertation fit, as per this differentiation, in the latter category. While her terminology remains in active use,[30] it should be used with caution. The differentiation of terracottas along the lines of changeless and timed is not always valid. At various points in history, timeless forms have influenced timed ones, and vice versa, this is illustrated in this thesis in images from the Northwest in Chapter 3. In other words, if the timeless type is open to timed influences, it no longer remains timeless! All the same, her study drew scholarly attention to those terracotta objects that could not be temporally located on the basis of their style, and accorded them their rightful place as important expressions of their makers' faith.

Kramrisch's article had the advantage of being as comprehensive a survey as possible at the time. Being already well-versed in the styles of stone and bronze sculptures of India,[31] her temporal location of pieces in specific periods became a benchmark utilised by subsequent scholarship. In 1939, she identified the typical 'Śunga' terracotta female figure with different attributes in her head-dress as the *Apsaras Pañcacuda*. Although this important iconographic attribution is now contestable, it still remains in use by modern scholarship. Like Agrawala, her iconographic appellations and chronology can now be fine-tuned.

One of the most prolific writers in the field has been S C Kala. His studies have however, been mostly in the form of catalogue raisonné of the Allahabad and Lucknow collections. His work on *Terracotta Figurines from Kaushambi*, 1950, was developed further in *Terracottas of the*

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[27] Chandra, M: 1973: p. 1- 47, Kala, SC: 1980: p. 22, Pal, P.: 1987: p.21.

[28] See the introductory notes by BS Miller: 1988, Kramrisch: 1968.

[29] Kramrisch: 1939: pp 89-110.

[30] Pal, P.: 1987:p. 12, Poster, A.: 1986: p. 17 – 18.

Allahabad Museum, 1980.[32] The Allahabad Museum houses perhaps the largest collection of 'pre-Śunga', 'Śunga' and Gupta terracotta. Once again, although supplemented with several illustrations, being catalogues devoted essentially to objects from the Upper-Gangetic Valley, the studies are limited. A catalogue of the collection of the State Museum, Lucknow, was published by him in 1993.[33] Again, an important collection, but poorly reproduced images make it a difficult work to use for careful study. Being a catalogue it has little explanation or mention of any difficulty in dating the images or establishing their iconography.

Several other more general works are also available. However, most of these writings seek to illustrate previously unpublished images in the light of the paradigms for investigation established by Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch and Agrawala. These publications are concerned less with the broader iconographic, iconological or artistic and religio-philosophical import of the images than with merely situating them within a particular period and geographic location.[34]

Devangana Desai's writings mark a clear break from previous ones. Her in-depth analysis of erotic imagery in India examines *Mithuna*, *Maithuna* and *Dampati* type images from the 'Śunga' period.[35] This has been discussed later in this work. Another widely published article by her on the social background of Ancient Indian terracottas appeared first in 1978.[36] The article attempts a social history of art, by linking development in terracotta art to trade and urbanisation.[37] Though such writings with an economic basis for an examination of artistic, cultural, religious history can be criticised, the article does make some valid points. Yet, the

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[31] She had already published her comprehensive survey of 'Indian Sculpture': Kramrisch 1933.

[32] Kala, SC: 1950 and 1980.

[33] Kala, SC: 1993.

[34] See for instance, Anand, MR: 1969, Dhavalikar, MK: 1977, Dasgupta, CC: 1961, Srivastava, SK: 1996.

[35] Desai, D.: 1975.

[36] Desai, D.: 1978, 1983, 1986.

[37]The article is based on much of the existing Marxist history of Ancient India, and relies in some part on the writings of historians like RS Sharma. The implications of her investigation are addressed in the concluding chapter.

very basis of this article can be questioned as terracotta is a medium which can and indeed is produced with a relatively low degree of technology, in a rural setting (and so not requiring an urban environment) whether or not there is an increase in mercantile activity. However, as she rightly points out, the style of the figures and the subject matter of the compositions betray an urban setting.

The link between terracotta and Urbanism had also been proposed by SP Gupta.[38] Gupta's is a detailed study of Mauryan art, which raises several important issues that have bearing on the dating of terracottas, the meanings behind the works and the possible influences that helped create them. His chapter on terracotta divides the material into a site by site analysis in the course of which he reassesses the chronology of these sculptures. Most importantly, he establishes a continuum between Mauryan and Śunga art.

Two further exhibition catalogues deserve mention. An exhibition in 1986 at the Brooklyn Museum showed some representative examples of Indian terracotta and remains a useful introductory study.[39] In the accompanying text to an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum, Pal discusses currently held views regarding these figures and suggests some iconographic interpretations anew.[40] The work however, is a limited catalogue of a few pieces. Pal extends Robert Redfield's theory that civilisation is a "compound structure of Great and Little Traditions", to Indian terracottas, where the 'Great Tradition' "is a learned and literate tradition, preserving and developing the dominant systems of thought and value of a civilisation" as opposed to "the nonliterate, grassroots cultural heritage of the Little Tradition".[41] He further extends the idea of the 'Great Tradition' in India as linked with 'Sanskritisation' and the 'Little Tradition' with expressions of what Kramrisch termed 'timeless' images.

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[38] Gupta, SP: 1980.

[39] Poster, AG: 1986.

[40] Pal, P.: 1987.

While Pal concedes that terracottas straddle both the 'Great' and 'Little' traditions, I have avoided using those terms, as I have the words 'folk' and 'classical', 'timeless' and 'timed'. There exists no real polarisation of tradition in the Indian image making context, as the dynamic between the two allegedly opposing ends is always active. Even if we try and accept the categories, Timeless and Great, Folk and Sanskritic, they are seen to constantly feed each other to an extent that the differentiation often, at least in the case of the images considered here, becomes invalid, as no one category exists as pure. Furthermore, even Kramrisch in seeking to explain the philosophical or cultic impulse that engendered the 'timeless' images from the Proto and Early – Historic periods looks to highly sophisticated Sanskrit literature.[42] Although the interpretation may be valid, it then negates ideas that these images are expressions of a nonliterate culture that stands in opposition to one that expresses a 'Great Tradition'.

The most recent work written specifically on post-Mauryan terracotta is a monograph by J K Bautze, 1995. It is a careful and considered study concerned with establishing typologies of figures that can be examined for their iconography. It illustrates several previously unpublished figurines and plaques which are in a good state of preservation. But being a brief monograph, he himself points out that discussions on dating, styles and exact provenance are not dealt with.

In this dissertation an attempt has been made to provide a more holistic study. The first objective is to collate and compare an enormous corpus of terracotta images. Where appropriate, they are compared with objects made in other media, including stone, bone, ivory, wood and gold. Much of the material surveyed has never been published before. Many of the objects that have come to light in recent years, (and are now in private collections internationally), have been included in this study only after their authenticity could be verified by thermoluminescence testing and through close comparisons with excavated pieces. This study will attempt also to differentiate between the regional styles of terracotta imagery. My

[41] Pal, P. 1987: p. 12; following Singer, M.: 1972: p. 55.

stress here has been not so much in finding exactly what external influences may have shaped post-Mauryan terracotta, but to contextualise them within and differentiate them from their antecedents in India itself. This allows us to suggest a revised chronology for the pieces. Towards this aim, archaeological sites, their stratigraphy and nature of assemblages have also been examined in detail. Finally, the iconographic and iconological significance of the terracotta images is considered in relation to both subsequent Indian canonical prescriptions and contemporary imagery.

[42] Kramrisch, *ibid*: pp. 91 – 95.

Chapter 2

EARLY HISTORIC MOULDED TERRACOTTA THEIR INVENTION AND ANTECEDENTS

The volume of art remains encountered by the archaeologist in the immediate post-Mauryan period are without precedent: whether they be of the stone stupas or the 'minor' arts in ivory, terracotta, wood, bronze or of any other metal which are under discussion here. This vast quantity had led scholars to conclude that there must have been a long antecedent tradition of image making carried out in perishable media which we have not had the fortune of studying. However, because no study actually lists the possible continuities from preceding ages, art-historical discourse on the imagery of approximately second century BC to first century AD tends to present it as wholly without precedent. Few noteworthy sculptural remains prior to this period have come down to us, and those which are available, seem to be sporadic discoveries. The period from the Indus valley to the Mauryan – Śunga period has, consequently, been a perplexing, millennium long hiatus in Indian art history.

The terracotta under examination in this thesis is part of that tradition of making works of art in perishable, renewable media - which thrives to date in India. Terracotta objects are found in excavations from the Neolithic period on. Many of these objects are utilitarian wares, but others are images. Mostly rudimentary, still, they allow us to speculate on the nature of contemporary artistic inclinations and perhaps their patrons' cultic affiliations. Admittedly, to do justice, in a short chapter, to a study that traces the continuum from Neolithic to Early Historic Moulded terracotta imagery, is both unwieldy and in danger of presenting gross inaccuracies since the archaeology and dating of the sites is questionable. At the same time, if there is any medium through which tracing continuities may be hazarded, it is through terracotta art. Although their styles may vary from one period to the next, these images have some common concerns. To that extent, a continuum from Neolithic figurines through Proto-Historic and Bronze Age ones in the Indus Valley up until Mauryan and post-Mauryan ones is traceable. It helps understand that this art is one that has developed from earliest times on indigenous soil, that it is an evolving, thriving art form, serving the changing needs of its

patrons. It has never been a static art form but always open to influences, and in turn deeply affecting the production of art in other media, whether in the Subcontinent or along the trading routes of the ancients. The purpose of the ensuing survey in this chapter is not to provide a detailed study of antecedent terracotta but to contextualise the excellence achieved by the Early-Historic craftsmen as a remarkable interpretation of an inheritance harking back millennia. Various sites have therefore been excluded, and only key excavations and figures mentioned.

This chapter is divided into three sections. It looks, very briefly, at Bronze Age and Indus Valley material first and then concentrates on the immediate antecedents (*c.* 400 – 200 BC) to Early Historic moulded plaques. This is because 'Mauryan' terracotta and other minor antiquities have a greater bearing on their immediate successors. In the last section of the chapter we are then able to introduce the techniques and styles of the post-Mauryan moulded terracotta plaques in the light of their antecedent history.

I. Development of Figural Terracotta Sculpture up until the Early-Historic Period

Neolithic to proto harappan cultures:

The site of **Mehrgarh** in Pakistan is strategically located between the end of the upland valley system stretching from eastern Iran and the beginning of the Indus plain. The transitional nature of its position, as Allchin says, is echoed in the nature of cultural remains found at this site.[1] The site has a long history. While it has sporadically revealed interesting sculptures from periods II and IV (dated approximately from the fourth to mid-third millennium BC)[2] for our

[1] Allchin, B and FR: 1982: p.105. As with most Subcontinental archaeology, the dating at Mehrgarh has been achieved by relating its pottery to that from other sites, making the periodisation of the different occupations at the sites relative.

[2] An unbaked male torso is seen along with the earliest fired pottery in Mehrgarh II. Period IV has revealed a female figure reminiscent of examples from Namagaza III and Kara Depe in Central Asia and also of early material from Rahman Dheri. Interestingly this is the phase when we also find the earliest stamped seals and ring stones.

purposes, it is only towards the end of the habitation of this site in period VI (late third to early second millennium BC), that we start seeing large numbers of developed figurines. Figures from this period and the following period VII are widely published.[3] [*Fig. 2.1 and 2.2*] These figurines are modelled by hand, and embellished by appliqué jewellery and other details. They are marked by elaborate hairstyles and jewellery, particularly by multi-stringed necklaces and large earrings. The more voluptuous figurines of period VI with their large breasts, broad hips with their seemingly separate legs tapering to a point at their feet[4] are similar to those reported by Fairservis[5] from **Damb Sadaat** II in the Quetta Valley. Period VII sees greater naturalism in the figures. Though they are still hand modelled and decorated with small appliqué details, small holes for eyes, elaborate hairstyles and necklaces, these figures are slimmer than those from the preceding period. They are similar also, to those reported by Casal[6] from **Mundigak** IV in the Kandahar area and the well-known '**Zhob**' figures from Quetta and North Baluchistan.

A remarkable evolution of figures is thus seen in the late Neolithic proto-Indus valley cultures of Mehrgarh I through IV, sites in Northern Baluchistan (Zhob Valley) like Rana Ghundai II C,[7] Mundigak IV, Damb Sadaat II and III to Mehrgarh VI and VII. This continuity from the earliest unbaked figures of the sixth – fifth millennium BC till the early second millennium BC has been noted by several scholars mentioned above. There are fewer male figures than female, and noting the emphasis on their generative nature, tapered stump legs which might have been dug into the earth, one is tempted to agree with Allchin that "it seems quite certain that they represent the presence of a cult of the Mother Goddess".[8]

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[3] Among recent publications see Banerji, A.: 1994 & Allchin, B and FR, *ibid.*

[4] See Allchin, *ibid.* p.149, fig. a. Note also that this feature of tapering joint legs is seen at various sites until the early historic period.

[5] Fairservis Jr., WA:1975 (2nd edn.) p. 142, fig. 9 for Damb Sadaat figures and p. 131, fig. 14 & 10 for Mundigak types

[6] Casal, JM: 1961.

[7] Excavated by Sir Aurel Stein in 1924 (see: *An Archaeological tour of Waziristan and Northern Baluchistan*, Memoirs of the ASI, No. 37) and revisited by Fairservis, WA: 1950.

[8] Allchin, *ibid.*, p. 150.

The sculptors of these figurines have laid stress on the hairstyles, jewellery and have also highlighted the aspects of fecundity in their images. Concerns, which remain the most persuasive and enduring aspects of terracotta images heretofore. Other features such as the presence of elaborate bicornate headgear, the wearing of a series of short necklaces at the base of the neck followed by another long one that extends until the navel, remain popular until the Early-Historic period.

In addition to these figures which bear a thread of continuity with subsequent imagery, it is also worth noting the category labelled "timeless" by Stella Kramrisch. As Kramrisch says, these are figures less conditioned by stylistic and iconographic developments in time and space, instead they remain a vibrant parallel tradition through the history of Indian art right up to the present. Crudely modelled, with appliqué pellets bringing out their eyes and other features, we have no secure way of dating these objects, other than thermoluminescence testing. Even then, only a broad range of dates can be suggested. However, in cases where we have been lucky to find these objects in scientific, stratified excavations, we know that they were produced from a very early pre-Harappan date. These images bear little or no variation for millennia and almost identical cultic images are made to date. Again, the generative aspects of these images are pronounced, highlighting the continuity in primeval beliefs in the productive feminine.

MATURE HARAPPAN CULTURES

Commenting on the sculptural art of the Indus Valley period various art-historians have remarked that their stylistic origins are unclear. At the same time, as Huntington says, "they do not appear to be the tentative formulations one would expect in a beginning art tradition."[9] With the unavailability of antecedent art remains in the Subcontinent scholars have looked outside India, particularly to Mesopotamia to seek sources for this tradition.[10] As regards the

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[9] Huntington, S: 1985, p.12.

terracotta however, we have noted that there were figurines being made close to Harappan sites at least 1500 years earlier. I feel it would serve us better to recognise the continuing thread of this stylistic expression, even if it be a study limited to the medium of terracotta.

'Art' remains are invariably the only peepholes through which we can reconstruct Harappan religion or social values until the decipherment of the Indus script. There are relatively few stone or bronze sculptures from this period but the universally popular terracotta cult figures and toys are well represented. These have been found from several sites, and seem to be a consistent expression of Harappan cultures from *c.*2500 to 1750 BC, first in the Western parts of the Subcontinent and later, until approximately 800 BC in the Eastern sites. Their geographical spread is broad, taking in its purview a core region of Western Panjab, spreading into Sindh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and areas further afield. The most common depictions are of birds and animals- monkeys, dogs, sheep and particularly bulls. Human figures are also popular, where male figures are less common than female. Other objects such as dice are also discovered occasionally.

These terracotta are hand modelled with applied details[11], technically much like what had been followed earlier in Baluchistan, Quetta and other pre-Indus sites, with the exception that there was now a greater elaboration and detailing in the style. Most female terracotta figures are simply modelled, their style marked by a linearity and two-dimensionality, despite being made in the round. Continuing the tradition of their ancestors, it is common to find these figures wearing large amounts of jewellery: a short torque, multi-stringed necklace, large earrings, girdles and armbands, all topped by an elaborate headdress.[12] [*Fig. 2.3*] The ornamentation and any indications of costume are applied as coils, strips or pellets to a simple modelled form. Their prominent breasts are also subsequently applied. These sculptures can be of

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[10] During Caspers, E.C.L. 1993, p.183, makes a strong case for the relationship of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Chhanudaro figures to be related to those from Sumer (Ur).

[11] Allchin says that, "a few pieces are certainly made in single moulds" [p.206, *ibid.*] Though I have not been able to see any Harappan moulded pieces myself, their presence though largely unrecorded would not be that surprising considering how highly developed and sophisticated their tradition of seals and sealings was, which are manufactured in much the same way as moulded terracotta plaques are.

women standing, seated or mother and child groups. Although the function of these figures remains problematic, their heavy ornamentation and exaggeration of their features, emphasises their generative aspects. They may well be, as they are often called, "representations of the great mother, the descendants no doubt of those of Mehrgarh and other earlier sites."[13]

Among the animal figures listed above, the most popular, as in earlier cultures were those of bulls. Two kinds of bulls are found, humped (*Bos indicus)* and humpless (*Bos primigenius*) and scholars believe that they might have had cult significance. Animals are more naturalistically fashioned than humans. [*Fig. 2.4*] A not entirely convincing ethno-archaeological explanation for this has been offered by scholars like SP Gupta. He refers to the same trend in Mauryan terracotta, where he found "iconic" images of females were more stylised, the artists had deliberately eschewed naturalism, while the "non-iconic" animal figures were more true to life. Taking a cue from a similar trend found in India to date, he suggested that the "icons" are purchased "not so much for their beauty and workmanship as for their votive value". The non iconic types however, must visually appeal to a customer.[14] Not only is attention paid to the animals' volume, depth, musculature, but the pieces can also be very expressive. Important also, are the toy carts that have survived from this period. These small plain terracotta toys are perhaps the earliest models for what became extremely popular in the Early-Historic moulded terracotta. [*Fig. 2.5*]

A religious or cultic meaning can be associated with at least some of the objects. The presence of composite creatures, humans with animal heads in terracotta or the famous seals from Mohenjodaro which show animals with humanoid features, figures appearing out of plants and other fantastic creatures - reveal ideas where various powers of nature are merged and expressed in unity. [*2.6 and 2.7*, the latter is a seldom-reproduced Harappan seal that shows

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[12] As noted by various scholars, it is the absence and not the presence of jewellery in Indian art that is a notable irregularity.

[13] Allchin, *ibid.*, p. 207.

[14]Gupta, SP: 1980, p.174 – 175.

a female figure giving birth to a plant.] The National Museum (Delhi) has a famous terracotta piece that shows an animal headed pregnant female that demonstrates this point well.[15] [*Fig. 2.8*] At least the supernatural character of the figures in examples like the 'proto- Shiva' seal, the depiction of a figure being worshipped in a *Pīpal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*), the symbolic *Pīpal* with unicorn like heads or the horned tiger with a humanoid figure behind it [*Fig. 2.6*], or the figure of woman with a plant issuing from her genitalia [*Fig. 2.7*], amongst many others, can not be questioned. They exhibit that same deep understanding and simultaneous coexistence of the worlds of man and animal, a respect for nature, for generation and regeneration, which characterise much of later Indic art.

POST INDUS-VALLEY CULTURES TO EARLY-HISTORIC INDIA

This is one of the most perplexing hiatuses in the history of Indian art. With the decline of Harappan urbanism, small peasant agricultural settlements began to emerge across the Subcontinent. There is a vexing paradox of the relative absence of any developed material culture for approximately a thousand years being coeval with a prodigious and sophisticated body of Vedic literature which became one of the most abiding influences on Indian civilisation.[16]

Though not of the same sophistication as Indus valley terracotta, there are pieces which have been revealed from what are called 'chalcolithic' sites. Sites such as Pirak in Baluchistan (a short distance from Mehrgarh and Naushahro) exhibit vestiges of both Harappan and post Harappan cultures up till level III, 1000 – 800 BC where we continue to find both unbaked and terracotta figurines of horses and Bactrian camels.

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[15] Exhibited Poster: 1986: catalogue No. 2, p.75

[16] As Huntington says (1985, p.26), this gap in our knowledge may not be permanent. Just as the Harappan cultures were suddenly discovered, and just as much of the recently discovered perishable media from early historic period under study in this thesis have appeared, without any prior examples despite the many excavations for over 100 years, we may also find some post Harappan sites.

At the same time, in the northern valleys of Swat, Dir, Chitral and Indus have been discovered a series of cemeteries called the '**Gandhara Grave Culture**'. Among their distinctive range of grave goods are flat terracotta tablets shaped in a rough human form with appliqué breasts, broad hips, stylised pinched heads and sometimes, like their Mehrgarh ancestors they might not have two separated legs but a stylised tapering stump. [*Fig. 2.9*] They may also have incised jewellery and eyes.

In his work on the 'Pre-History and Proto-History of India and Pakistan', Sankalia[17] mentions many sites in Maharashtra (commonly called **Jorwe** cultures, after a site by that name). Of interest to us are the sites of Nevasa and Inamgaon where, in Phase III, (1500 – 1050BC), terracotta mother goddesses with oblong, tubular bodies have been discovered. This is a type that becomes fairly widespread in the 'Iron Age'. Another noteworthy discovery of the Jorwe period was of a copper hoard which included four large chariots or carts in **Daimabad**.[18] These four solid cast pieces are fashioned into an elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo and a chariot drawn by two bullocks. [*Fig. 2.10 and 2.11*] They all have axles to accommodate wheels either on the underside or through the solid platforms on which they stand. The weight of these pieces (over 60 Kg. in total) makes one wonder if they were toys. At any rate, there is no denying the popularity of making both carts and animals in the Subcontinent from pre-Indus Valley levels through to the "Śunga" period and even later.

'Art' remains, which are invariably our only visual remnants of ancient patrons' faiths, must consequently be examined with adequate reference to what we know of contemporary religious ideas. It is, in this seemingly intermittent lull between approximately 1750 – 800 BC that some of the most significant developments in the religio-philosophical ideas of Indian civilisation took place. These have had an enduring influence on every aspect of both the material and non-material cultures. Yet, as mentioned earlier there are few archaeological discoveries from this period. At the same time one cannot escape wondering what sort of

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[17] Sankalia, HD: 1974.

[18] These pieces are now housed in the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay.

ideological shifts might have influenced the development of the sophisticated imagery which marks the commencement of Early-Historic India.[19] It is well known that Vedic texts though rich in literary imagery, do not give any conclusive indication of images or religious architecture (save the altars at which sacrifices would have been performed). Nonetheless, they express the concerns of a highly influential community which gradually took its ideology Eastward to the Gangetic valley. Chronologically, the Upaniṣadic literature which followed this, was even less concerned with imagery and instead, was interested in more philosophical postulates, with its emphasis on the relationship of the individual with the undifferentiated universal 'soul' or *Brahman*. Within this climate of reaction to Brahmanic ritual ascendancy and the growing strains of asceticism and metaphysical discourse, arose the two historical personages – Gautama Buddha and Vardhamāna Mahāvīra. Much has been written on the currency their faiths (Buddhism and Jainism) gained and the reasons for it. These faiths are of art-historical interest as most sculptural remains (published so far) from the Early-Historic period subscribe to one of these two heterodox sects. Although historians concede that other image making Indic faiths must also have their origins in this period - we have so far, not had much evidence for that. The terracotta imagery of *c.* 200 BC – AD 100, as mentioned earlier, might be an expression of any of those faiths or cults. The images are surveyed in chapter Three, and a study of the environment that would have engendered this imagery is available in chapter Four.

II. EARLY HISTORIC INDIA

The Early Historic period is generally agreed to begin around *c.* 600 BC at most sites in India.[20] However, most anthropomorphic imagery, that affected the art of the moulded

[19] There are several identifiers for the start of the Early Historic Period in India, not just the re-introduction of anthropomorphic imagery. More than any other factor however, the Early Historic Period is marked by the rise, once again, of urbanisation. All the usual features that define 'urbanisation' accompany this: script, cities, agricultural surplus to support tertiary occupations, etc. The definition of 'urbanisation' however, is in itself contentious. For a summary of the arguments in relation to Early Historic India, see Chakrabarti, DK: 1997: pp. 1-9.

plaques discussed in this present work start making a coherent appearance in about the third century BC. It is for this reason that this section is the main focus of this chapter, as it is concerned with the immediate antecedents for what is popularly called the 'Śunga' style. Both the archaeology and the art history of this period are fraught with controversies, and some of those issues will be addressed here.

The dramatic arrival of highly sophisticated expression in stone in India in the Mauryan period has attracted much art historical debate for close to a century now. The principal controversy is over whether Mauryan art has its roots in indigenous soil or if it's prototypes are to be sought further west. Between these two opposing views lie different shades of grey – and scholars may select any one that they wish to uphold, depending on the concessions they are willing to make for each side. But there is no consensus on which region to the west of India had the most bearing on the art of the Mauryas. Most of these arguments hinge on the dating of this material. Looking for archetypes in pre-Mauryan India is invariably abortive, as we have no works of a similar scale or style. Scholars keen to find its roots in India either push for a pre-Mauryan date for what is commonly regarded Mauryan and thereby establish a continuum between the two periods; or, rely on interpreting early Indian textual sources to show the potential for an image / pillar making culture as being deeply embedded in the indigenous psyche. Yet, as mentioned earlier, conclusive empirical evidence is hard to come by. Equally, *exact* parallels with Achaemenid, Assyrian, Egyptian or Hellenistic art are not available either. Coomaraswamy sought to resolve these controversies by proposing that the art of these regions was a part of a common West Asian heritage, a common Aryan *Weltanschaung*, of which India was an integrated part. This view too has been criticised subsequently.[21]

Because scholarship has largely been concerned with the cross-examination of only the monumental and sophisticated stone art, accompanying this set of arguments is another: that

[20] Different sites developed signs of Early Historic urbanism at different dates. For a discussion on the summary of the arguments on archaeology of the intervening period between Harappan and Early Historic cultures, see Chakrabarti, DK: 1997: pp. 124 – 140, and for the commencement of urban settlements in the Early Historic period, see pp.162 – 164, 242 – 249.

the art of this period forms but a brief episode, with little impact on succeeding cultures. NR Ray (following Stella Kramrisch) went to the extent of saying, "it was a glass house plant, reared by the will, care and patronage of a court... In the course of time the glass walls fell and the plant withered... Mauryan art failed to have any influence on subsequent Indian art."[22] Coomaraswamy himself divided the corpus of Mauryan material into two categories: 'court' and 'folk' art.[23] The former was recognised as part of the paraphernalia of the 'imperialism' and socio-political institutions of the Achaemenids which informed the Mauryan court. This included the palace at Kumrahar and the 'Aśokan' pillars. The not so sophisticated 'folk art', expressed primeval Indic cultic affiliations. These included the terracotta, Yakṣa and Yakṣī sculptures as well as Mauryan ring-stones. It is this latter group which is our principal area of study here.

There are many critiques of the use of labels such as 'court' and 'folk', and to indulge in a discussion on that would be a cliché at this point. One can hardly continue to use the disparaging tag of 'folk' for the intricate Mauryan ring-stones, terracotta or Yakṣa / Yakṣī statues purely because they may not be associated with a court. If anything, the refinement in their workmanship and the insight they provide into contemporary ideology must be our criteria to judge them. Since this material has not been investigated as closely as it warrants, it remains on the fringes of scholarship on Early-Historic India. There is an undeniable link between these art forms and those of subsequent centuries and without an examination of the so-called Mauryan 'folk art' we can not fully contextualise 'Śunga' art. The most thorough attempt to integrate this material into mainstream Indian art history was made by SP Gupta in 1980.[24]

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[21] For differing views, see, for instance, Coomaraswamy, AK: 1927(a), Irwin, J: 1973 – 76, 1981, Jayaswal, KP: 1937, Harle 1986 (reprint 1997), Chandra, M: 1952-53, Morris, R: 1989, Gupta, SP: 1980.

[22] Ray, NR.: 1975: p. 48.

[23] Coomaraswamy, 1927(a).

[24] Gupta, SP: Delhi, 1980.

MAURYAN DISC AND RING-STONES

Gupta meticulously lists all the available interpretations of this material and suggests some of his own.[25] These have been added to more recently by PK Agrawala in a monograph devoted to the subject.[26] The disc and ring-stones are, as their name suggests, flat cylindrical tablets. Usually referred to as Mauryan, they might (as, for instance, at Taxila or Ropar) come from levels that are pre-Mauryan, while others have on stylistic grounds been given dates closer to the 'Śunga' period. The more widely known ones have a hole with sloping sides in the centre, carved upon which, are evenly dispersed female figures in low relief. [*Fig. 2.12*] This figure is usually nude but for her jewellery which includes at least a girdle and necklace. She wears a large wig like hairdo; her hands fall straight by her sides and feet point in opposite directions. The prominent pudendum and broad hips highlight her generative qualities. [*Fig. 2.13 and 2.14*] This type of figure is known in gold as well, as in the small repoussé plaques from Lauriya Nandangarh, and two from the reliquaries in the Piprahwa Stupa.[27] [*Fig. 2.15 and 2.16*] The dating for these pieces is questionable, however most scholars now agree that it must be between 500 – 300 BC[28]. At any rate, they were made considerably earlier than the terracotta images of the same style which are no earlier than approximately 200 BC. The figures on the ring-stones are invariably associated with foliage of some kind: wherein her figure either alternates with a palmette or she might even be emerging from a vine scroll. This foliage is at times recognisable as a palm tree, lotus or honeysuckle. At other times, it is stylised to a point that its correct identification and origin have become another highly controversial subject. John Irwin traced some motifs to Egypt whence they travelled through

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[25] *ibid.*, pp. 28-36, 66-72, 99-128.

[26] Agrawala PK: 1993.

[27] *ibid.* pl. 99 –101.

[28] KM Srivastava re-excavated the site in 1972 and determined the pre-Aśokan dating of the site. See Srivastava, KM: 1986.

Persia to India or, to the Levant, Assyria and Asia Minor and then to India.[29] In the earlier part of this century it was common to relate this motif to the Greek anthemion. More nationalistic scholars interpret the motifs as variations of lotuses. SP Gupta has called one of the commonly found stylised forms, "*Nāgapuṣpa*".[30] In another type of disc human figures are rare, and instead we find animals – usually deer, bulls, birds etc.

A detour analysing the origins of motifs in pre-'Śunga' minor antiquities does not benefit our present study. What is more relevant is to trace and note the immediate predecessors of the Early-Historic terracotta – so that we are able to establish a thread of ideas that carry into our period, and so give it some sort of an historical context. In his monograph on the ring-stones PK Agrawala notes that, "...their outstanding value for the study of ancient worship, especially that of the mother goddess, is unquestionably established as regards the period for which the only other equally extensive... archaeological evidence is provided by the terracotta figurines."[31]

Among the various subtypes that show humans is a remarkable one from Kosam (Kaushambi) in the private collection of Moti Chandra.[32] [*Fig. 2.17*] This stone fragment shows a typical figure with an undifferentiated steatopygic nude goddess with a narrow waist, clearly rendered round breasts, a noticeable hairdo and disc shaped earrings. Unique, are the wings over each shoulder and the clearly represented lotus from which she emerges. In addition, she holds two stalks that flank her. These spring from the lotus blossom at her feet. A circle of dots forming a sort of aureole encloses the lower part of her body, beginning below the breasts and terminating in the lotus below. Moti Chandra has already noticed the similarity her facial features, especially the long slanting eyes, share with appliqué decorated terracotta figurines

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[29] Irwin, J:1975: p.635-6.

[30] Gupta, SP: 1980: pp. 99-115

[31] Agrawala, PK: 1993: Varanasi, 1993, p.2

[32] Moti Chandra:,1973: No. 12, p. 45, fig. 10; Agrawala, PK: 1979: p.85 and by the same author in 1993, p.13, pl. 22; Gupta, SP, 1980, 1980 pl.19c, p.65.

from Mathura.[33] More important to our study here is to note the extraordinary iconographic similarities with terracotta plaques from the Middle and Lower-Gangetic Valley. It is common to find 'Śunga' terracotta goddesses emerging from lotuses, or standing on them. In addition, a body of winged figures that abound in the terracotta have already been noted by various scholars like J. Auboyer and SC Kala (they have also been considered in the following chapters in this thesis).

This close association with plants is seen in two other ring-stones. One of the most charming of all the disc fragments is from Kaushambi, in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No 20083). [*Fig. 2.18*] It shows a meandering floral scroll, in what must have been a delicate pattern, punctuated with rosettes, lotuses and serrated feather-like leaves. Emerging from a calyx towards the edge of the disc is a goddess. She is shown in three quarter view, holding on to two stalks on either side of her. She wears a skirt like garment which disappears below the hips into the plant. From another calyx near the centre of the disc springs a horned deer running in a counter clockwise direction. There must have been four such goddesses and deer when the piece was complete. The second piece, from Mathura, in the collection of the Mathura Museum (No. 2259)[34] is in a similar vein as the one above. [*Fig. 2.19*] From a more tightly composed floral scroll come forth eight goddesses clad and adorned like the ones in *Fig. 2.18*. These figures appear to be dancing, and this may be significant. There are no animals on this fragment.

A stone disc without the central hole from a hoard that was discovered at Murtaziganj, Bihar shows animals, birds and men in addition to the typical goddess. This piece in the collection of the Patna Museum (No. Arch. 10738)[35] has a central lotus medallion surrounded by an outer register with figural depictions. [*Fig. 2.20 a, b, c*] This band is demarcated into a semicircular arrangement by two palm trees that are positioned radially at opposite ends of the disc. The

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[33] M. Chandra, *ibid.*

[34] Agrawala, PK: 1993: p.51-52.

[35] Agrawala, PK: 1993, p.32-33, pl. 45; Shere, SA: 1951: pp.178-90.

central figure in each demilune is the characteristic ring-stone goddess: frontal, steatopygous, her arms falling by her side, and nude (save the jewellery she wears). She is approached on either side by two men, each with a raised arm. There are other animals which face her as well. She is clearly the central protagonist of this scene. Her undifferentiated nature, stylistically and iconographically identical with all the other ring stones, aided by the importance accorded to her here show she was an ancient cult goddess. [36] We may assume that her cult spread over a broad region since she is no different from the figures on the ring-stones that have been found across the Northern parts of the Subcontinent.

In this connection it is also worth taking note of two other pieces: the first is a disc, excavated in Ropar, Punjab, by YD Sharma.[37] [*Fig. 2.21*] Period III at Ropar, to which this piece belongs has stratigraphically revealed a long continuance of habitation from 600 – 200 BC. It has therefore been usually ascribed a pre-Mauryan to Mauryan date. Though only a fragment of the typical ring-stone variety, on its outer register, sandwiched between two cable mouldings it bears at least one scene showing a man worshipfully before the goddess. She stands next to a hut thatched with leaves (perhaps of *Pīpal*) under a tree. On the other side of the hut are a man and woman exchanging a sphere like fruit, which is perhaps destined for the goddess. As Agrawala suggests[38], this worshipful / ritual attitude may further be illustrated through a stone (steatite) plaque from Rajgir, Patna District, Bihar. [*Fig. 2.22*] The rectangular plaque is divided horizontally into three equal parts. Each cable-bordered compartment shows a man and a woman. In the top one she is dancing while he plays a lute, while in the central frieze the male holds a cup which his partner reaches for. In the background lies a flask. Unlike the top two registers where the figures are clad in heavily pleated clothing, in the lower one they are both nude. Interestingly, the woman has transformed, taking on her conventional form as

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[36] It is not clear, but it seems that one of the men on either side is nude. Agrawala suggests this might indicate a cult where intercourse is ritually performed as a fertility rite at the shrine of the goddess. *Ibid.* p.34.

[37] Sharma, YD: 1955-6: p.125, pl. XLVI, fig.13.

[38] Agrawala, PK: 1993, pp. 64, pl.93. He further interprets this piece along with others as having Tantric connotations.

goddess, just as she appears on the ring-stones. This piece has also been given a pre-Mauryan or early Mauryan date.

The connection with ritual performance involving music and dance is significant and will be dealt with in Chapter 4. While on the subject of disc-stones however, another fragment from the Lucknow Museum[39] shows a couple engaged in music and dance. Next to them is a woman carrying a vessel lustrating what appears to be a cross like symbol propped up on a mound. [*Fig. 2.23*]

The last important piece which shows a connection with 'Śunga' terracotta is a soapstone disc in poor condition from Mathura, in the Mathura Museum (No. 2472). Both VS and PK Agrawala have noted the iconographic importance of this piece.[40] Emerging from a central lotus medallion are the stalks of a floral scroll which pattern the disc into four rhythmic and symmetrical quarters as well as two registers radiating from the centre. The inner band is divided into four cartouches, each with an animal (a lion, antelope, bull and deer) moving counter-clockwise. In the outer band are visible three of the originally four figures. VS Agrawala had identified them as female while PK Agrawala feels only the central figure wearing a skirt and jewellery and holding a bowl up in her right hand with the left akimbo is a goddess. He further tries to identify her with the later Indian goddess of plenty, *Annapurna*. Next to her a figure with an unusual headdress (with a piece of fabric wrapped around the face) is seen holding a trident in his right hand and a *vajra* (thunder bolt) like attribute in the other. The figure may, therefore, be related to Siva. The third figure, though the most damaged, appears to be a man holding a bow in one hand and three arrows in the other. Numerous Early-Historic terracotta are found with male figures holding a bow and arrows. They have also, like this piece, been considered proto – Kāma figures owing to their attributes.

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[39] Agrawala, PK: 1993: pp. 53-54, pl.79.

[40] Agrawala, PK: 1993: pp. 52-53, pl. 78; Agrawala, VS: 1965: p.77, fig. 43 (No. 3).

Continuities with the moulded plaques can be seen in individual motifs like the weapons held by some of these figures or those in the hair of the gold repoussé plaques from Lauriya-Nandangarh and Piprahwa. Similarities may also be traced in the style of the shallow two-dimensional relief, which is popular in the "non-courtly" Mauryan and Post-Mauryan art. Also worth noting is that the find-spots for most Mauryan artefacts are also the sites where most 'Śunga' objects are found. The Early-Historic moulded terracotta are quite literally built upon their immediate history. Gupta uses this point to illustrate that there is a strong cultural tradition that continues from these early levels into the Mauryan. These iconographic and stylistic parallels across media were shared between the minor antiquities as trends which were not as short lived as previously believed, but obviously spanning both, the entire Mauryan and pre-Kuṣāna periods.

MAURYAN TERRACOTTA

Closest in style and manufacturing technique to 'Śunga' terracotta are their immediate predecessors in the Mauryan period. The predilection towards the female form marked by a two dimensionality in appearance despite being in the round, large hairdos, heavy ornamentation with prominent necklaces, girdles, earrings and bangles, emphasis to the hips narrow waist and visible breasts – are all features which endure through this and succeeding eras. The Mauryan craftsman's break from the past is seen in the remarkable sophistication of his pieces. The objects are detailed and there is a strong introduction of a decorative aesthetic which reached its apogee in post-Mauryan terracotta. Surfaces are embellished with small rosettes and lozenges, jewellery and ornamentation is carefully designed and patterned. Most importantly, the craftsmen start using moulds and stamps commonly. These are combined with the old technique of modelled figural forms. Typically, the moulds are reserved for faces and the bodies are modelled. The adornment is appliqué, as seen in previous periods, but often these coils and pellets of clay were stamped with a stippled lotus, rosette, *cakra*, cross-hatched or striped motif. Within this general style, individual sites and regions had their own distinct expression. Some of the most prominent styles are discussed below.

THE GENERAL UPPER AND MIDDLE-GANGETIC VALLEY STYLES:

This includes, predominantly, the sites of (and neighbouring regions around) Ahichhatra, Mathura, Sonkh, Kaushambi and some figures from Patna and Rajghat. The convention of prominent breasts, narrow curving waist and extremely broad hips immediately brings to mind the figures on the ring-stones. Stylistic differences can, however, be seen in their facial features, accoutrements and technique of production. For instance, their moulded faces are usually upturned, graceful and long; with large elongated, almond shaped eyes carefully highlighted with a double incised border and lightly pursed lips. [*Fig. 2.24 and 2.25*] Their hair is usually combed and parted in the middle and the forehead decorated with a beaded band. On the head the female figures sport large discs or lotus pistils. The central roundel on her forehead is given prominence. It draws ones attention to the bicornate hairdo which is invariably lost beneath the discs. She wears similarly shaped round earrings. Around her neck are a short torque and long necklace which curve between her breasts and fall to her navel. The broad hips are covered with a multi-stringed girdle of round or lozenge shaped beads which can sometimes sandwich a string of medallions. Few pieces are in a complete state of preservation. In these we can see the figures' bracelets, armbands and anklets. In contrast to the heavily ornamented front, the reverse is bare, usually showing only the decorated bands linking the discs on the head. These fall to the middle of her back.

One of the most important pieces in this category from Mathura is in the collection of the National Museum, Delhi (No. 60.291).[41] It shows a similar goddess figure seated on a stool with a child in her lap. [*Fig. 2.26*] Mother and child groups have been seen from the Harappan period on, and continue as a clear iconographic formula into 'Śunga' terracotta and till much later periods. Her associations with the epithet 'mother goddess' are further borne out by the conventionalised modelling of her form and stress laid on her generative nature.

Male figures are less common, and mostly we have only fragments. Some intact pieces show them as riders on elephants or horses. Compared to the female icons, they are more

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[41] Asthana, S., "Archaeology" in SP Gupta(ed.): 1985, No. 69; Gupta, SP: 1980, pl. 78 a,b.

naturalistic. The deliberate stylisation and exaggeration of the female form shows a conscious attempt on the part of the sculptor to eschew naturalism. If that is mark of investing the figure with supra-human qualities as may befit a deity, then what can we say about the male figures? The male figures are also not associated with any specific set of attributes and are not excessively ornamented. As a result, it is harder to read a cultic affiliation in their form. There is also a corpus of attractive images of animals, again usually elephants and horses. The elephants are executed with confidence, their stylised form shown with short hind legs, an upward sloping body and proud trunk. Like the other pieces, they are embellished with stamped and moulded applied jewellery. Again, there is no obvious reason to read symbolic or religious meanings into them, and they might well have been toys or served a decorative function. All the above pieces can be of red or grey to black terracotta.

BUXAR TERRACOTTA

The site of Buxar in Bihar, although a part of the Middle-Gangetic Valley, has a unique and distinct style of sculpture in this period. It is in keeping with the general style of Mauryan terracotta of hand modelled bodies with moulded faces. However this is where the similarity ends. Usually seated, their legs support the sculpture in front and a stump acting as a third leg completes the tripod that balances the figure. [Figs. 3.156 – 3.162] They have slim hips, prominent breasts and their out-stretched arms are lifted up to a height below shoulder level. Their smiling moulded faces are topped by the most remarkable turbans, hats and coiffures. They wear little jewellery and are relatively plain, barring the over emphasised headgear and noticeable earrings. This limited ornament is at times stamped with a whirling *cakra* or rosette, incised or stippled. Most of these pieces are housed either in the Patna Museum or are now in the Site museum at Buxar, built upon the private collection of Shri. Sitaram Upadhyay. Although the century or so later moulded terracotta plaques from Buxar are more detailed, the figures have the same slim form and elaborate headgear. Sonkh, near Mathura has also revealed some terracotta figures, similar to the Buxar ones at Mauryan levels. Again, Sonkh is a site that shows many continuities between its Mauryan and post-Mauryan terracotta The

similarities and differences between the figures of these periods have been noted by Härtel, the excavator.[42]

A small rock crystal pendant fashioned in the style of a Buxar face from Sonpur near Gaya in Bihar[43]also shows the same style of an elaborate hat with lateral extensions. [*Fig. 2.27*] Not only is it worth noting the influence these features have on later terracotta, they are all under the bracket of what are called 'minor' antiquities. It seems therefore quite clear that the monumental stone arts of the Mauryas were influenced by a different set of styles than the more popular and personal arts in terracotta, wood, ivory or other precious materials.

PATALIPUTRA / BULANDIBAGH TERRACOTTA

From the sites in modern Patna hail the most exceptional sculptures in terracotta we have from this period. These large modelled figures, in the round, invariably in dancer like poses wear pleated skirts with moulded faces and relatively little plain jewellery, and stand on their own pedestals. [Figs. 2.28, 3.163 and 3.164] They are housed in the Patna Museum. The possibility of Hellenistic influence on these figures has been noted by various scholars and most recently by Dhavalikar.[44] Expectedly, more nationalistic scholars like Gupta counter this view.[45] The similarity in the technique of production with other Mauryan terracotta, of moulded faces on modelled bodies, the lack of emphasis to anatomical correctness and more particularly to the stump like legs are usually sited by them as reasons to view them as a growth from the Indic traditions.

Although there are many differences between the terracotta found at Patna and the Early Historic moulded plaques, there are some underlying correspondences as well. The Mauryan figures from the site invest an unprecedented naturalism and sophistication to images made of

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[42] Härtel, H.: 1993, pp. 88 –89.

[43] Gupta, SP: 1980: pl.109b; also Untracht, O: 1997: No. 310, p. 170.

[44] Dhavalikar, MK: 1977, p.21.

[45] Gupta, SP: 1980: p 166

terracotta. An ideal that was far removed from the general stylisation of the female form which had been reserved for the medium so far. The expression of naturalism and decorativeness were carried forward into the subsequent arts in terracotta.

Wherever the inspiration for the immediate predecessors for Śunga terracotta may have come from, we cannot undermine the rich and remarkable progression in the growth and development of Indian terracotta and other sculptures usually placed in the category of 'minor' antiquities. The above survey has shown that certain abiding ideals particularly in the depiction of the female form hold strong from the pre-Harappan period on. This allows us to contextualise the material under study in this thesis. The progression to refined, fully moulded plaques is a logical culmination of the Mauryan style. Another significant point is that most 'Śunga' sites have a preceding Mauryan layer. Sites that have revealed one period's objects, usually carry the latter's as well. Each site may carry more images of one type or sub-style, but seldom do any Early Historic 'Śunga' sites reveal pieces unrelated to each other or to their Mauryan history. But most standard, well-known works have sought to define post-Mauryan terracotta in contrast to the Mauryan aesthetic. This can no longer be done. Instead one finds notable correspondences between the two periods. Most assessments and arguments have so far been based on contrasting the Mauryan pillar capitals with the railing sculptures of Bharhut, Sanchi etc. Instead, while one should continue to understand the art of this period in relation to the preceding ages, we must study both periods complete and not make our judgements by selecting only a small corpus of material for comparison from each age. The 'minor' antiquities of the Mauryan period discussed above, are obviously both numerically vast and vital windows into that period for us to study them complete with similar genres in the succeeding period. Only then will we be able to really establish an informed and true shift in styles. This foundation acknowledged, we can better appreciate the innovations and developments in post-Mauryan terracotta.

III. The Style and Technique of post-Mauryan Moulded Terracotta

The term 'post-Mauryan' is not reader friendly, but 'Śunga' (which is more commonly used) is very misleading.[46] Since no one dynasty was dominant enough to lend its name to the entire artistic output in the time, I have continued to use the words Early-Historic for the period as a whole and post-Mauryan to refer roughly to the period between 200 BC to AD 100.

This period is marked by a dramatic increase in, and extremely refined expression of, a cohesive style of sculpture that is found over most of Northern South Asia. The style has many local variations and predilections, but these are harder to spot. Objects have been found in a wide variety of media - stone, terracotta, wood, ivory, gold, rock crystal and bronze. The style is marked, above all, by a two-dimensional, decorative and narrative character. Free standing figures in the round, although known (for instance in the large Yakṣas and Yakṣīs) are nowhere near the numbers of relief sculptures. The images are always concerned with an exuberance of natural forms. Plants, flowers and trees move in linear rhythms across the surfaces pervading all interstitial space and also form compartments, demarcating the space itself. All the activity of human and animal forms then, is within, and in association with nature. The majority of the stone images come from a Buddhist context and this is the earliest body of *visual* or artistic utterance of that faith. The other sculptures from the period, mostly clubbed under the heading of 'minor antiquities' have their own distinct iconographic concerns. We can not therefore be certain that they too express the same religion as their stone counterparts. Yet the styles and compositions are closely related. Though the iconographies may be at variance, the abiding concerns are similar. An art-historically significant fact

[46] The inappropriateness of the word 'Śunga' has been discussed in both the Introduction and Chapter 4.

remains that there are more 'minor antiquities' for this period than there are stone images. By far the most prolific medium that has survived from the period is terracotta.

The terracotta plaques show a preponderance of human figures, and these are mostly female. Figures are profusely decorated, care is taken to delineate jewellery on the hair, neck, torso, arms, wrists, hips and ankles. Tiny rosettes and other motifs can flood the background of the plaques. Their adornment apart, care is taken to indicate the fine folds and pleats of their fabric, their facial expressions. There is a strong tendency towards the decorative, even in the plaques which show an isolated heraldic and frontal female figure. More importantly, though individual sites may have their own local flavour or style, there is consistency in these ideals across the Subcontinent. The sculptors also have a stock of gestures, poses and attributes that they use in a variety of combinations. There is consistency in these too.[47] A study of the entire gamut of material shows a well-developed stylistic programme that spans the entire region North of the Vindhyas, (i.e. Northern South Asia) - from unrecorded sites in modern Bangladesh through the Gangetic valley and Nepali Terai to Panjab and the North West Frontier.

In order to discern the styles and techniques of the plaques, it is important to first appreciate the very medium of terracotta. Terracotta, very simply put, is clay that has been fired and not glazed. The clay used by the image-makers of a post-Mauryan site was largely the same as the type used by the local potters. Since the clay comes mostly from riverbeds or alluvial plains, the sites that have revealed these objects are concentrated in those regions.[48] Clays are of several types and textures and potters and sculptors can sometimes mix several different clays. Preparing a desired, workable clay can involve several other processes, various tempering materials may be added, the clay must be cleaned, and must be made plastic and malleable enough. The post-Mauryan terracotta sculptor used two different consistencies of

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[47] The importance of these iconographic and compositional continuities within the moulded plaques has been discussed in the following chapter.

[48] Fashioning objects and utensils from clay is one of the oldest human activities. Human habitation has invariably been in alluvial plains, near readily available sources of water. Clay is therefore usually plentiful.

clay. He either pressed soft clay into his moulds or poured a thick liquid-slurry like clay into them. Because all clay shrinks, the moulded plaque is appreciably smaller than the mould it was made from. This also means that the detailing on the piece shrinks, making the workmanship appear finer on the finished product than it was on the mould itself. The shrinkage in clay happens in two stages. First when the water in the clay evaporates, and later when the piece is fired in the kiln. The moulds used in this period are also made of terracotta. As a result they are porous, and soak the water in the impressed clay rapidly. As the plaque begins to shrink, it naturally prises itself off the mould. [*Fig. 3.41*]

Before the plaque is completely dry, i.e. when it is leather hard, it can be covered with slip of another liquid clay that can fire to a different colour than the clay used for the core. This technique was used rarely and only at a few sites. Leather hard works are also ready to receive any stamped or appliqué details, any finishing touches of shaving excess bits of clay or any action that will bring definition the quality to the workmanship. The suspension holes which are commonly found on the plaques are also made at this stage.

Once dry, the pieces are ready to be fired. All clay must be fired to at least 600°C so that it becomes hard enough to not easily break when the object is used. From a surface examination of the pieces it seems most plaques were fired to about 750°C. Though we do not know exactly what type of kiln might have been used for these objects, it is likely that they were pit-fired, a technique that is the more favoured one in the Subcontinent and also used by contemporaneous potters. Both types of firing: oxidation and reduction were employed. The clays used by the sculptors had a high percentage of iron. As a result, firings where a greater amount of air was admitted into the kiln (allowing the iron to oxidise), coloured the plaques reddish orange or, when the percentage of iron was low, to a beige or buff. In reduction firings, the amount of air permitted into the kiln during the firing is minimal, this reduces the iron content in the clay to fire to a grey to black colour. Reduction firings were popular in the Mauryan period in the Mathura region, and continued, particularly at Ayodhya, Mathura and their neighbouring sites, in post-Mauryan terracotta. Sculptors employing this technique often

used a grey clay and covered these pieces with a black slip, to enhance the effect of the reduction firing.

The terracotta plaques are made by pouring clay into moulds. The moulds themselves are made of terracotta. [*Fig. 3.200 a, b, 3.201a*] No images have been found that can claim with any definitiveness to be the original, first images or first positives, from which moulds might have been made. There are a few exceptionally large terracotta images that have been found from Eastern India, which although in the style of the moulded images are actually made by hand. It is possible that they might have been used as the original positives for moulds. However, the technique of casting coins, bronze, seals, and even terracotta images was not a new invention. While there is no period in Indian art when the technique was as popular, moulding and stamping were already familiar. For the coins and bronzes the craftsmen would probably have used wax to make the first positive, being the dominant technique of casting in the Subcontinent through history and to date. We have already noted the widespread use of moulds for sculpting faces and jewellery in the Mauryan terracottas.

The terracotta plaques are made using a variety of techniques. Some techniques were more popular at one site than another, just as some techniques lent themselves better to certain styles, or may have been reserved for certain iconographies. The most popular are those made from single presses from moulds. These plaques are in the shape of a flat tablet, usually of irregular outline. They are all two-dimensional, but the extent of relief can vary. On the whole, it seems that the pieces from Bengal are generally in higher relief than others. Exceptions to this are of course available. The Bengali pieces are also the most decorative. The decorative quality is enhanced mostly through very fine stippling. There is an over emphasis to the jewellery worn by the ladies, as well as their head gear. They are associated with specific attributes, and are commonly seen with both lotuses and imaginary flowers. The best known of the group are the figures that bear the iconographic norm of sporting weapons in their hair. Dancerly poses and defined gestures are common. There seems to be a conscious engagement with conceptions of the supernatural, fertility and wealth, joyousness and celebration, maternity and protection. The male figures, though less common, are also

iconographically varied. They usually wear a distinct type of turban with a large projection to one side. There seems to be no uniformity in the size of the turbans. On the whole, they are more plain than their female counterparts.

Single moulded plaques can, on the basis of their composition, be further divided into four broad categories. The most popular are those which emphasise one main, central figure. This is usually a female. The amount of contextual detail can vary greatly in these pieces, where some goddesses may be enshrined in elaborate arched interiors flanked by pillars with animal capitals and diminutive attendants or be situated in a sacred tank, while others can show just a single figure. Although the plaques are essentially two-dimensional, the artist can at times use innovative techniques to break the restriction of his plane. For instance, the lower section of the plaque, bearing the figure's feet can curve forward extending towards the viewer. (Understandably, this is the weakest section of the plaque, and explains why we have so many images that survive without their feet, and why there are large numbers of feet that have been found separately.) Rarely, an attempt at foreshortening the architectural background can also be seen. The second group includes those compositions where there are more than one figure (usually two) of equal importance. This is usually seen in the case of the *mithunas*. In a third group we may include pieces where there are several figures or animals or both. These have a strong narrative quality. The plaques are no larger than the others, in fact they are usually smaller than those which show iconic goddesses, but the surface area is crowded with many small figures with poses and gestures that indicate their involvement with each other. Lastly, the pieces which were moulded to fit with other single moulded pieces, form the fourth group. This is seen in the case of some toy carts where each of their four walls were separately moulded and then stuck together when they were leather-hard.

A technique popular mostly in Bengal and at Kaushambi, seen to a lesser degree at most of the other sites is of double-moulding. Two curving single moulds formed the from and back of the object to be cast. The single moulded plaques were then stuck together at the edges, forming, usually, a hollow, three-dimensional sculpture. This was mostly used for the pot-bellied dwarf yakṣas. At times, a few pellets of clay could be suspended inside them which

would make them rattle when they were used. Double-moulding was also used for tricycles and toy carts, in these cases however, the pieces are not hollow. The earliest reference to double-moulded figures in India comes from Period IV at Mathura.[49]

The technique of modelling human forms by hand, but using moulds for their faces and stamps and small moulds for the pieces of jewellery was already known in the Mauryan period. This continued into the subsequent phase, with one notable exception. The style of the figures was more graceful and attenuated, and at least in Bengal, the technique was reserved for larger (often over 30 cm high) pieces. Pieces of this sort are rare, and extremely fine. Only a few pieces have been excavated or come from recorded surface collections, mostly they come from the rampant illicit digging in Eastern India.

Lastly, is the still more unusual group of pots that bear surface decoration akin to the moulded plaques. These can be thrown and then affixed with a moulded plaque on its exterior, be entirely moulded, or potted slightly more thick so that their surface can be carved into. While the last technique does not involve any moulding, their style and design is hardly different from the single moulded plaques. Pots with surface decoration, moulded or carved, are very rare. They have mostly been found in Bengal, and occasionally at sites in Bihar.

Early Historic moulded terracotta express an unprecedented and conscious multiplication in iconographic types and techniques of manufacture. They are stylistically refined, naturalistic, with a particular flair for the decorative. Above all, this was a period where the use of moulds superseded all other manufacturing methods, and their widespread popularity was not to be rivalled again in Indian art-history. There are regional variations in the style and iconographic predilections in the terracotta. These will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4. Extraordinary though these innovations were, they were not entirely, as they have been shown by most general studies, in contrast to their antecedent history. The technique of moulding, the underlying objectives of the anthropomorphic imagery, the stress on their

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[49] Joshi, M. C.:1989: 165-170.

generative qualities, elaborate turbans and hairdos, jewellery – had been concerns of Indian terracotta artists for centuries.

Once we have a continuum, we can try and use the style to date the plaques. Our dating of post-Mauryan terracotta has been constructed largely on the basis of style. Where, Bharhut has been taken as a benchmark against which all other subsequent and preceding styles are judged. Consequently, no room has been left for the hypothesis that the 'minor' antiquities of these periods might have heralded the 'Śunga' school. If for no other reason, then the fact that the ivory carvers of Vidisha are accredited in an inscription at Sanchi with the carving of the monumental stone railings, must be taken as evidence to prove that the style may have originated in such 'minor' arts.

Even in stratified excavations, the layer from which the terracotta hail has usually had a long period of habitation, or the dating of the site is controversial (as at Ahichhatra or Mathura). SP Gupta makes a strong case to redress the current system of dating the 'Mauryan' material.[50] Not only is some of it technically close to NBP ware, the stratigraphy of many of these sites has revealed a habitation that began in 600 – 300 BC. Stylistically, these figures are akin to the goddesses on the ring-stones which have been dated at sites like Taxila and Ropar to Pre and Early Mauryan levels. Other pieces are known to come from strictly Mauryan levels, but significantly, single moulded plaques, which are usually taken to be strictly 'Śunga', have at times accompanied them (at sites such as Kaushambi and Sonkh). This compels us to question the current system of dating. Gupta feels that we must introduce a clearly separate period called the 'late Mauryan' that should include some of what is considered 'Śunga' terracotta and stone railings.[51] Such a category would only serve to further fragment our material, by once again finding new compartments defined by a few transitory stylistic features. Dynastic labels like 'Maurya' or 'Śunga' are in any case not appropriate, as none of the art under study is courtly. Besides, as mentioned elsewhere, the Śunga are a dynasty we know little about. It

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[50] Gupta, SP: 1980: p. 141-143, 145, 166, 181-82.

[51] *Ibid.* p. 345-46.

has also been argued that many 'Mauryan' terracotta pieces were made in about 400 BC, i.e. over a century before Chandragupta came to power.[52] They continued for about two centuries and towards the decline in their style, were contemporary with single moulded plaques. These were popular for a further 200 years and again, towards the close of that phase, they developed in some regions (such as Eastern India) into double moulded pieces as well, which have so far been thought of as strictly Sātvāhana. In the North and West however, at sites like Sugh, the single moulded plaques start displaying facial features which are at times close to those of Kuṣāna Mathura. A hybrid nomenclature of 'Śungo-Kuṣāna' is therefore used at times for such pieces. Watertight dynastic periods do not express sufficiently the movements and growth in artistic expression. To study the gradual development of the style, iconography and shifts in social and cultural concerns in this formative period we would have to study it complete from 450 BC till approximately AD 300.

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[52] *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

STYLES AND SITES WITHOUT NUMBER
TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF FORM AND ICONOGRAPHY

Although the terracotta of the 'Śunga'[1] period seems to be stylistically similar at first glance, a closer look shows several variations from one region to the next. The primary objective of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the wide variety within Early-Historic terracotta imagery. In the process of doing this, we will be able to notice what variations occur in the sub-styles of each region, and at some sites, what appears to be a localised idiom, particular to that site alone. Further, we will try and establish what specific forces may have informed the artistic styles of these pieces. In addressing this aspect, I have tried not to discuss what influences the creation of the immediately pre-Kuṣāna style in general, and have instead, tried to focus more on what specific socio-cultural and stylistic factors may have impressed upon the imagery of the particular region from where a piece hails. A more general discussion on the antecedents to Early-Historic terracotta is available in Chapter 2. Lastly, in order to contextualise these images, I have tried to compare them with broadly contemporary ones made in other media. The comparisons also allow us to see the regional variations that exist in their iconography, and suggest what that iconography may mean. A further study on the nature and implications of this iconography is available in the following chapter.

The chapter aims to provide a consideration of the development of the styles of terracotta imagery. A very brief note on the study of better-dated stylistically comparable material allows the study to propose suggestions on the chronology of the styles between (roughly) the Second century BC to the First century AD. This differentiation also allows us to see the greater amount of similarities between the figures in iconography, symbolic vocabulary and artistic morphology. These relative relationships between regional styles and chronological

[1] Although most of the terracotta discussed in this thesis tie in with what has been termed the 'Śunga' style in the rest of the Subcontinent, I have tried to avoid using that term. 'Śunga' refers to the name of a short lived and fairly obscure dynasty or several dynasties who may or may not have been related to the Mitras and Kanvas in Central and Eastern India. Considering the limited extent of their political domain, whether the entire corpus of immediate post-Mauryan and pre-Kuṣāna art warrants the nomenclature 'Śunga' is questionable. Instead, I have tried to use the less reader-friendly, but hopefully more accurate phrases - 'Early-Historic terracotta' and 'post-Mauryan'.

advances, individual cultic affiliations, iconographic predilections are factors used for the lines of enquiry initiated for stylistic reasons in Chapter 2. By corollary, it provides a framework on which the further interpretations on the nature of the iconography can be related to the wider socio- religious and economic history discussed in Chapter 4.

This chapter is divided into six main sections. The first five are based on the main geographical regions covering Northern South Asia: the Northwest, Indo Gangetic Divide, Upper-Gangetic Valley, Middle Gangetic Valley and Lower Gangetic Valley or Eastern India. This division is largely one of convenience.[2] Although a regional sub-style can be seen in each division, the outlying sites, which near those from another division naturally have many points of correspondence with the neighbouring area. This is particularly so with the sites in the Gangetic Valley. A concise note on the archaeology of 25 major Indian sites celebrated for their terracotta contexualises a study of the artefacts. Pieces from many more sites were however studied and are referred to here in passing.[3] Each of these sections is further divided into two parts. The first introduces the main sites of the region, their geography, archaeology and complexities in their dating and stratigraphy. The next discusses the actual pieces from the region, comparing and contrasting them on grounds of iconography and style.

Having introduced the variety of pieces from these regions and introduced the difficulties in precisely dating them, the last, Section 6, concludes with the examination of the style as a whole: both within the context of the entire range of sculptural arts of this period (including stone, bone, ivory, bronze and gold) and within the medium of terracotta.

DK Chakrabarti (1997)[4] and FR Allchin, *et al.* (1995)[5] provide the most up to date general survey of the archaeology of the sites discussed in this chapter. A Ghosh's[6] (edited)

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[2] This division is used in many works on Indian archaeology and is fairly standardised. For a recent survey of the geological and topographic features of each region and the sites included therein, (and the one I have followed), see Chakrabarti, DK.: 1997.

[3] A list of the principal collections and sites visited in the course of this research is available in Appendix 1.

[4] Chakrabarti, DK.:1997, pp. 167 –219, 242 – 262.

Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology remains a useful overview, with comprehensive bibliographies on each site. These three works have been used as basic texts for the archaeological information given in this Chapter. The more particular and detailed data on the sites is from specific reports and notices in journals by several authors. Of the individual reports that remain benchmarks for the chronology of this period, useful for the dating of the terracotta imagery, mention must be made of Härtel's – *Excavations at Sonkh*,[7] John Marshall's – *Taxila*[8] and MC Joshi's reports on Mathura[9]. Along with these guides, material from more than 50 sites is correlated to suggest a chronology for the style of Early-Historic terracotta. [*Map, fig. 1*] No work has previously been conducted to comprehensively study the entire gamut of moulded North Indian Early-Historic terracotta as a whole before.[10] The studies on the subject attempted so far have been mostly limited to examinations of one site or a region. Even here, the Indo-Gangetic Divide and the Lower-Gangetic Valley have received negligible attention. The material available on the Northwest seems to be largely archaeological. Art historical studies on the terracotta plaques of the Northwest are very few and hardly any recent research (over the past 40 – 50 years) on the Early-Historic phase in the region has been published.

Of the terracotta arts as a whole, only a fraction of what is available has been published. These are mostly littered in excavation reports or in more general *catalogue raissoné* of museum collections. In this regard the following are useful: VS Agrawala's *Mathura Terracotta*[11] and *Ahichhatra Terracotta*,[12] SC Kala's *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*[13] and

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[5] Allchin, FR., *et al.*: 1995.

[6] Ghosh, A.(ed.): 1989.

[7] Härtel, H.:1993

[8] Marshall, Sir John: 1951.

[9] Joshi, M.C.:

[10] The few studies that are available, and their relative contributions to the field are discussed in the Introductory Chapter.

[11] Agrawala, VS: 1984 (reprint of 1936).

[12] Agrawala, VS: 1984 (reprint of 1947-48).

[13] Kala, SC: 1980.

Terracottas in the Lucknow Museum,[14] P. Pal's *Icons of Piety, Images of Whimsy*,[15] AG. Poster's *From Indian Earth*,[16] Moti Chandra's "*Terracottas in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras*"[17] and JK Bautze's *Early Indian Terracottas*.[18] However, despite these publications, some regions of India remain poorly represented, for instance – the Indo-Gangetic Divide, parts of the Northwest, and the most plentiful source of this imagery, the Lower-Gangetic Valley. The objects discussed in the sections concerning these regions are, as a result, largely unpublished. Art historical discussions on the chronology of the style have been restricted by the paucity of this material for available for study. The most influential works, useful for an appreciation of the style of the terracotta, used today by most art historians, remain those conducted by VS Agrawala,[19] Coomaraswamy[20] and Kramrisch.[21] Although their interpretations still remain valid, with the discovery of many more artefacts, previously held views can now be appreciably enhanced. With the comparisons afforded by the study undertaken in the present work, a chronological development of the style has been suggested in the concluding section. The data for this comes from the archaeology of the pieces discussed in the previous five sections and from the works of the art-historians

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[14] Kala, S.C: 1993

[15] Pal, P.: 1987.

[16] Poster, A.G.: 1986.

[17] Chandra, M.: 1971.

[18] Bautze, J. K: 1995.

[19] Agrawala, VS: 1984 (reprint of 1936); 1984 (reprint of 1947-48).

[20] Coomaraswamy, AK.: 1927 (b); 1977 (reprint of 1928).

mentioned above. However, the present study focuses for the first time, as comprehensively as possible (within the limitations of the permissible length of the work), on the terracotta imagery alone. Further, where more recent discoveries and unpublished images can nuance our previous views on the style, they have been incorporated.

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[21] Kramrisch, S.: 1939.

I. THE EASTWARD FACING NORTH WEST: BANNU/AKRA, TAXILA, CHARSADA AND SEMTHAN

The Northwest frontier has always been an ancient transit zone, situated quite literally at the 'crossroads of Asia'. The area, (more or less within the modern boundaries of the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan) lies between the Hindukush, the Salt Range and the Indus (hence also called the submontane Indus region). The geography of the region is quite varied and ancient settlements have been situated mostly in the plains of Peshawar, Kohat and Bannu to the West of the Indus and the Potwar plateau to the river's East. Even though the entire region is quite arid, receives little rainfall and is relatively infertile agriculturally, it's position as the last major gateway to the East, has attracted commercial activity for millennia. Two major trade routes converge in this region. The first went through the Khyber and other passes connecting the Kabul valley with mainland India and the other went to Kashmir and Central Asia.[22]

Although the region may have been consolidated into a *Janapada* ('republican federation') by the sixth century BC, a clearer history for the period can be reconstructed from the end of the fifth century BC when it became the twentieth Satrapy (or province) of the Achaemenid Empire of Iran. Considered one of their most wealthy and prosperous provinces, ancient Gandhara provided mercenaries for the Persians in their wars against the Greeks in the years 486 – 465BC. It is well known that, having conquered Darius, Alexander of Macedon marched Eastward into the region in 327 BC. The subsequent history of the region is marked by rapid political changes. Although the Northwest fell to Mauryan hegemony in about 303 BC, an outlying area such as this was always difficult to effectively control from the Mauryan capital in Pataliputra (modern Patna) in Eastern India. Alexander's own control over the region was short-lived. He left behind the small Greek settlements that were already present there prior to his arrival, and deputed several Greek generals to command his Eastern possessions. At first these were welded together under the Seleucid empire, however by the second century

[22] A third, southern route through Baluchistan, Sindh and Kutch has not revealed the same extent of terracotta culture, and is consequently not of the same interest for the present study.

BC the descendants of the Greek generals and those from Bactria along with the Parthians of Iran broke away to set up their own kingdoms. These rulers are usually referred to as the Indo-Greeks, and were active in the Northwest in the period from which the images we are discussing hail. Contemporary with some of their reign at least, were the influential tribes of Scythians (known as the Śakas in Indian sources) who had marched Southwest into the Indus valley having been displaced from their land around the Aral Sea. Indo-Greek, Central Asian and Chinese expressions of belief were added to the already diverse mix of local Animistic and Shamanistic religions, as were Indian (Vedic, Ajivika, Jain, Buddhist and Yakṣa) and Persian (Zoroastrian) belief systems. A wide variety of peoples have coloured the arts of this entrepôt and their eclecticism is well reflected in its terracotta as well.

Most of our information on the terracotta art of the region comes from the excavations at Taxila and Charsada, ancient Takṣaśilā and Pushkalāvati respectively. The Akra mound at Bannu has been systematically and gradually excavated in recent years, while Semthan in Kashmir still warrants serious exploration and requires further study. Apart from the wealth of the archaeology at these sites, references to some of them in ancient texts have been helpful in enlivening the excavations[23].

Charsada (ancient Pushkalāvati), west of the Indus, near modern Peshawar was fist excavated by Marshall in 1902-3. However, it was the subsequent excavations by Wheeler in 1956[24] and Dani in 1963-64[25] that revealed a more detailed picture of the site. Excavations have been centred around two mounds, Bala Hisar and Shaikhan Dheri and these have shown

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[23] For Indian sources on Pushkalāvati (Charsada), ancient in Indian sources, see, Law, BC, :1950, p.4, 14. For references in western classical sources to Peucelaotis and Proclais, see Majumdar, RC, :1960, p. 7, 15, 215, 257, 303, 341; McCrindle, J.W:1901. See also, Watters, Thomas, :1904. To these standard works, further references to Taṣaśilā (Taxila) can be found in Sukthankar, S. : 1920, pp. 36-41; Law, BC, :1954, pp. 129-31. Textual references to Semthan and Akra are scant, and in the case of the latter, identifying the ancient name of the site itself fraught with controversy. For a list of possible accounts for Akra see Khan, F., Knox, R. *et al., Akra: the Ancient Capital of Bannu, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan,* Forthcoming in 2000, to be published by *Journal of Asian Civilisations*, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

[24] Wheeler, Sir R E Mortimer : 1962.

[25] Dani, AH, : 1964-65, pp. 17-214.

that the site was in occupation from the sixth century BC to the end of the Kuṣāna period and later.

Akra, the mound in the Bannu Basin (33°N, 70°36'E) lies about 112 km Southwest of Peshawar and is the second major site west of the Indus. The mound lies 12 miles south of Bannu city near Bharat village on the bank of the Lohra Nullah. It has been dated with the help of recent systematic stratigraphic excavations and assemblages of various objects including coins, palettes, pottery and terracotta figurines have shown that the site was active from at least the mid first millennium BC through the Early-Historic period to about 1000 AD.[26] While previous explorations of the Bannu Basin concentrated on the pre and proto history of the site, more recent excavations and studies are re-examining the Early-Historic culture of the region. [27]

Semthan is the most poorly excavated of these sites, and most of what is known of the terracotta is not, unfortunately, from properly excavated sites, but from surface collections. Situated in Kashmir, Semthan is at some distance from the other three sites being considered in this section. However, as is well known, the art of Kashmir was deeply connected with developments in the Northwest. This is true of the Early-Historic moulded terracotta as well. The geographic importance of Kashmir lies in giving to the traffic from the Northwest and mainland Indian plains, access to the North (Gilgit and Hunza) and through Ladakh to Tibet and China. Although there is a wide distribution of Early-Historic sites in the valley[28], none of them have been systematically excavated. The limited excavations at Semthan have shown several periods of habitation. Period II even revealed some NBPW, usually taken as a

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[26] A survey of the significant and largely surface finds from the region that belong to the Early-Historic phase can be found in Harle, JC, : 1990, pp. 643-655. The most recent literature on the excavations conducted at the Akra mound by the Bannu Archaeological Project, concentrating on the Early-Historic period is available in Khan, F., R Knox, P Magee and K D Thomas, *Akra: the Ancient Capital of Bannu, NWFP, Pakistan*, publication forthcoming in 2000, see *supra*, fn. 5. I am grateful to Robert Knox for both sharing the text with me and discussing some of the material examined here.

[27] The earliest phase of human activity in the region can be traced to the Upper Palaeolithic phase of about 30-40,000 years ago, but this is, of course, not of concern here. An extensive Bibliography on the Bannu basin is available in Allchin, FR and B; FA Durrani and M Farid : 1986.

[28] *IAR* 1981-82: pp.16-19, 1983-84: pp.35, 1984-85: pp.23-24, 1985-86: pp.34-37, 1987-88: pp.31-32.

demarcator of the commencement of the historical period in South Asia, the NBPW also shows contacts with the Gangetic plains, where this ware was commonly produced. The moulded terracotta plaques from the site are mostly of female figures and have usually been given early Kuṣāna dates. While this dating is not secure archaeologically, stylistically the plaques do seem to show a greater amount of Hellenistic influence rather than Indo-Parthian, Śaka or 'Śunga' influences. Yet the pieces form an unbroken continuum from these pre-existing traditions active in the regions that surround the site, and it is for this reason that they are being mentioned here.

Taxila is archeologically the most extensively excavated site in South Asia, and we shall use the excavated terracotta from this site as a base against which we can study the other pieces from the Northwest. A series of excavations were conducted by Marshall between 1913 and 1934[29] which were followed by another season's digging by Wheeler in 1944-45. More recently, the Bhir Mound was excavated by Sharif in 1969[30]. Marshall discovered a wide variety of terracotta objects at the site including reliefs, toy carts and animals, rattles, whistles, playing dice, ornaments, ritual tanks and free standing sculptures.[31] These are dated between the third century BC and fourth century AD. In this section, we will address only the early clay objects made before the end of the first century AD.[32]

Three successive urban settlements (Bhir, Sirkap and Sirsukh) have been identified at the site within three and a half miles of one another. The earliest, Bhir Mound, although probably occupied from *c.* 500 – 200 BC was most active in the Mauryan period, around the third century BC. Most terracotta figurines come from the top two (of four) strata of the mound indicating that they date mostly between 300 BC – first century BC. Marshall[33] has suggested

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[29] Marshall, Sir John : 1951.

[30] Sharif, M. : 1969, pp. 7 – 99.

[31] Marshall, Sir John, : 1951, Vol. 2, p.439 – 475.

[32] For a recent survey of the variety of terracotta types from the site see Siudmak, John, "Terracotta Sculpture From the Ancient North-West: 300 BCE – 60 CE", forthcoming in Marg in 2001.

[33] *Ibid.* 1951, I: 98.

that one of the excavated houses possesses a religious character. This large house (180 x 70 feet, or approximately 60 x 23 m) is divided into two blocks by a narrow lane. The northern block is further divided into two courtyards, some thirty rooms and a pillared hall. The religious character of this hall is suggested by the occurrence, in its debris, of several terracotta plaques that showed a male and female (deity?) holding hands.

Marshall identified more than a dozen different major types of Early-Historic terracottas at the site. These are made from a red clay, and are of varying degrees of sophistication, either hand modelled or pressed from moulds. Of the two major mounds that were excavated at the site, Bhir is generally dated to *c.* 500 BC – 200 BC while Sirkap from the early second century BC to first century AD. There seems to have been, as far as an empirical survey of the material culture reveals, a period of overlap between the occupation of the two mounds. Many 'primitive' types of images were found at the same levels as those which are usually assumed to be the later, more sophisticated, moulded ones. What transpires then is that while the archaeology of the site can serve as a rough guide to dating these images, we are forced to be more flexible with our dating. And although the discussion in this dissertation is concerned largely with the moulded types of Early-Historic plaques, we must, owing to the nature and demands of the region, consider them along with their modelled and more 'primitive' cousins. This makes the study not only more broad based, but also more accurate, for not only are the two types of images found together, by implication, it means that they were being used at the same time. Second, (and this is dealt with at greater length in the previous chapter), though the techniques of manufacture and styles of these images seem, at first glance, to warrant the division of moulded and modelled into entirely different categories, there are many correspondences, particularly iconographic, between them. They are also found together not just in Taxila, but right across the Subcontinent. To study the moulded and 'primitive' images together, as different, yet related, contemporary expressions in clay is therefore a more accurate and holistic approach.

Further, as has already been mentioned, the objects discussed here have usually been bracketed under the tight compartments of 'primitive', 'Mauryan' and 'Śunga'. The ascription

of dynastic labels, on the basis of the styles these pieces exhibit has misled, in some measure, the dating of South Asian archaeology. Partially moulded 'Mauryan' terracottas seemed to co-exist with fully moulded and modelled ones, although a gradual shift from fully modelled to part-modelled-part-moulded to fully moulded images can be traced from *c.* 200 BC to the end of the first century AD. One cannot, therefore, simply assume that all moulded plaques are later than partially moulded ones, even though that does seem, generally, to be the case. Marshall felt the appearance of the more 'primitive pre-Mauryan' types in Mauryan and Indo-Greek levels was a case of early objects that 'happened' to continue into the latter phases. However, there are far too many of such cases to assume that they did not co-exist or continue to be *produced alongside* the early fully moulded ones.[34]

The first type of terracotta image to be discussed by Marshall is what he calls a 'primitive mother goddess' type[35]. [*Fig.3.1*]These crudely fashioned figures in the round are hand modelled with flattened bodies, short stumps for arms, the head with pinched, beak-like facial features, applied diminutive pellets for breasts and incised slits on the appliqué eyes. Sometimes necklaces may be indicated on these figures with crude stippling, or, they may be found wearing a more elaborate ornament across their torsos, intersecting in the middle of the chest, where a large medallion may be fixed. A characteristic feature is the stylised tapering section below the waist to indicate the legs. Unlike the comparable contemporary examples excavated from sites in the Gangetic plain, the legs of these figures are shown as one stump and not separated into two. Clearly since these images cannot stand on their own, they must have been either stuck into the ground or been used for some other ritualistic purpose. In this regard it is worth noting that this type of image is sometimes found as part of the "ritual tanks" discovered at Taxila.

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[34] As I have discussed in the preceding chapter this is true of not just the Northwest, but also of many other sites in mainland India, where 'Mauryan' style terracotta and other 'minor' antiquities (such as ring-stones and the few small stone and metal objects) are found together with 'Śunga' moulded plaques. The point about re-dating some of this material was first raised by SP Gupta (1980), who recommended that we allow for a separate 'late-Mauryan' phase. While the reasons and spirit of what he says in the work is absolutely true, another such closed dynastic label is prone to the same shortcomings of pre-existing ones.

Marshall identified three different types of "ritual tanks" at Taxila[36]. The most elaborate of them shows the goddess attached to a shrine in the middle of a small rectangular terracotta tank with steps leading up to the shrine from the base of the trough. [*Fig. 3.2*] The shrine itself can have two chambers. Oil lamps surround the rim of the tank on the corners, interspersed with birds with outspread wings. The base of the tank may have aquatic creatures like eels, frogs and tortoises. Marshall discovered one of these tanks at the foot of a small stupa at Sirkap, which he interpreted to show how primitive cults had attached themselves to Buddhist worship[37]. Ritual tanks are not exclusive, by any means, to Taxila. Although slight stylistic variations are present from site to site, they have been found in large numbers at Kaushambi, Mathura[38], Ahichhatra, Hastinapura and even as far south as the Deccan at Bhokardan[39].

Returning to the form of these figurines, it is important to note Stella Kramrisch's classification of them as the 'timeless' type of Indian terracotta, as their undifferentiated form is found across the subcontinent irrespective of political change over millennia[40]. Wheeler, who gave them the somewhat inappropriate name of "Baroque Ladies", excavated similar figurines at Charsada.[41] [*Figs. 3.3 and 3.4*]These figures were discovered from the specific mounds of Bala Hisar, Shaikhan Dheri and the nearby Sar Dheri. The Charsada examples are more elaborate, often with greater amounts of ornamentation and large floral head-dresses. However, they retain the same basic form of flattened bodies and a single tapered stump for the legs.

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[35] See Marshall, J.: 1951, Vol. 3, pl. 132, figs. 1-8.

[36] Marshall, *op. cit.* pl. 136, figs. 153 – 163.

[37] Marshall took a more ethno-archaeological approach, and sought to explain the specific ritual associated with these objects by connecting them with the *Yama-pukur-brata*, a Bengali ritual where unmarried women make offerings to *Yama*, the god of death. See Marshall, *op. cit.* pp. 466-67. A discussion on the link between pre-existing *Yakṣa* and other festive / cultic worship, early Buddhist material culture and their possible connections with early terracotta anthropomorphic imagery is taken up in another chapter.

[38] Härtel, H.:1993, pp. 195-203.

[39] Deo, S.B.: 1974, pl. 46-49.

[40] Kramrisch, S.:1939, pp. 89-110, (reprint: Exploring India's Sacred Art, (ed. BS Miller) University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983 and New Delhi 1994, pp. 69-84).

[41] See Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pl. XX – XXV and Dani, *op. cit.*, pp. 46ff., pl. XXIV – XXVII. Similar figures are also known from several other collections, such as the Ashmolean, Oxford (No. 1958.3) published by Harle

Although the Charsada figures seem to perhaps constitute a different group, there are many more points of similarity with other South Asian examples than there are differences, and this is significant. Although the specific style of the figurines is marked by its own regional sub-style or local idiom, it has the same underlying stress on floral head gear, elaborate hooped earrings and form of body. Whether East or West of the Indus, the Northwest was then a far more integrated region; and as far as the early terracotta is concerned, at least up to the first century AD, it was integrated within the general South Asian religious / artistic expression to a greater extent than is sometimes believed. This point will become more evident with the following discussion on the other types of figures from the region.

Following these examples of hand modelled figures, the next large, and most popular set, is of moulded ones. These are similar to those found in the Gangetic plain. Marshall gave some of these figures a Mauryan date, a suggestion we now find questionable. As a result, he further said that Taxila had a fundamentally Indian culture and that the occurrence of these plaques at Śaka-Parthian levels at Sirkap shows "merely stray survivals from the Maurya period, picked in all probability amid the Bhir mound ruins."[42] This is not entirely accurate. Indeed the pieces are very similar to the general fabric of excavated remains of Indo-Gangetic material culture, but the pieces he calls Mauryan are usually found in the Subcontinent in post-Mauryan levels especially at sites in the Upper-Gangetic valley where, not only are there paralleled in style but also in the nature of the entire assemblage of types of images. Finding them at Sirkap, dated roughly between the second century BC and first century AD should not, therefore, be looked on as the "stray" survival of these pieces into later periods, but taken as contemporary with their stratigraphy. This will allow us to study them in keeping with similarly dated objects from the rest of the Subcontinent.

In this regard one of the figures from Bhir mound is significant[43]. [*Fig. 3.5*]It shows a female figure standing frontally, her hair either arranged in two large buns, or its bicornate nature

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and Topsfield: 1987, pp. 6; and the V&A Museum, London (IM 29-1939) published in *In the Image of Man*, exhibition catalogue, fig 53, 1982, and in Poster, A.G: 1986, pp.116.

[42] Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 440-41.

accentuated with the attachment of discs on the head. Seemingly nude, it is likely that were it not for the wear, traces of a fabric covering her would have been noticeable. Her elongated arms fall by her sides. The small plaque (ht. 4.75") is moulded out of pink-reddish clay. This type of plaque is commonly found at sites such as Ropar and Mathura, and interestingly her form seems to be one expressed in a variety of media – on ring-stones, bronze and even in gold.[44] Y.D. Sharma's excavations at Ropar revealed an almost identically shaped bronze finial.[45] Similar figures on ring-stones have been illustrated in the Chapter 2 [*Figs. 2.12 – 2.20*]. Similar plaques have also been found as far west as Akra. [*Fig. 3.6, 3.7*] Most other examples of moulded, solitary, frontal female figures excavated from Taxila are unfortunately fragmentary[46]. [*Fig. 3.8*]

However, a figures in the collection of the V&A (IS 18-1951) is particularly well preserved. [*Fig. 3.9*] It is pressed out from a mould and was discovered broken in two. With the necessary repair, it stands 15 cm high. The plaque shows a single female figure frontally with her proper right arm bent and at her waist, while the other arm hangs loosely by her side. Typically proportioned, with a large head, she wears a diaphanous pleated lower garment secured at the exaggerated narrow constriction at her waist. The lower half of the figure is not unlike the several fragmentary pieces that have been excavated at Taxila. Framing her face on top is her hair, which is arranged in two voluminous buns with a large central medallion between them. Two long streamers decorated with circular bosses that reach her knees (and frame the figure) are suspended from her hairdo. A feature most ubiquitous of her Early-Historic date, are the 4-5 *āyudhas* or weapons in her proper left coif. This latter iconographic feature, it is well known, is typically and extensively found all over the northern regions of the

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[43] Marshall, *op. cit.*, pp. 443, pl.132-fig.9.

[44] A famous wafer-thin repoussé plaque of gold showing a female figure with exactly such a figure-type was excavated from the great stupa at Lauriya Nandangarh. A less well known set of gold plaques from Piprahwa is also known. See Figs. 2.15 and 2.16. Gold plaques of this period have been found from other sites as well, and in more recent years, sites in 24-Parganas district, Bengal have revealed a few. The latter group are scattered in international private collections.

[45] Sharma, Y.D.: 1955-56, pp. 121 – 129, fig.14.

[46] Other Fragmentary pieces from the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of the same type are housed in various collections, see for instance Harle, *infra*, fig. 7 for a piece from Akra in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (No. 1967.75), and another similar piece also from the Akra mound in the collection of the British Museum, accession No. not available, see Knox, forthcoming publication.

Indian Subcontinent, and in this case goes further to show how far west the cult of this goddess had spread.

Three small bronze figures, probably discovered West of the Indus should also be considered here. One of these small, hollow cast female figures is in the collection of the Peshawar Museum (678-M) is said to come from Bannu.[47] [*Fig. 3.10*]The other two are very similar pieces in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1973.7 and 1993.18). [*Figs. 3.11, 3.12*] They are all almost the same size (9.5-10cm), and show a figure wearing a *dhoti*-like lower garment secured quite high on the waist by a girdle, their proper right hand akimbo and the other falling by the side, a long necklace falling over the breasts down to the waist and their faces framed by earrings and elaborate coifs of the type so common in Early-Historic imagery. Were it not for the wear, it seems likely that these figures would have worn the typical 'Śunga' weapon shaped hairpins. Harle accepts the general dating of these figures as first century AD,[48] yet one must remember that their closest stylistic parallels come from the Indo-Gangetic Divide and the Gangetic Valley in terracotta dated largely to the first century BC. All three figures have deep holes drilled in the top of the head in order to attach the figure to another object. The usually accepted opinion that these figure served as mirror handles has been questioned by scholars, including During-Caspers and Harle who illustrates a male conch shell figure, also from the NWFP, which might be slightly earlier and also has a hole on top. It has been suggested that these pieces might have been used as legs for furniture. We may also recall, in this regard, the famous Indian ivory figure discovered at Pompeii (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples) [49] which also has such a hole on top. While the male conch figure and the Pompeii ivory are not necessarily religious images, the three bronze figures discussed above clearly tie in with the common perception of Early-Historic female divinities, that are iconographically and stylistically consistent across Northern South Asia. To me, it seems unlikely that such religious imagery would have been put to purely 'secular' use,

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[47] Discussed by Harle, J, :1987, pp. 650-655, fig. 9.

[48] *Ibid.*

whether as a mirror handle or as a furniture leg, unless of course, those objects were being used in a religious context.

Akra has also revealed another type of moulded terracotta female image which has been called the 'Akra Devi' on account of her widespread prevalence at that site.[50] The pieces are almost always fragmentary and show an oval shaped plaque with a female torso with her hands in *añjali mudra*. The lower body is truncated, and sometimes ends in a short dowel. It has been suggested that these pieces were made to fit into sockets on the shoulder of vases or jars. Similar pieces have been found at other sites as well. Related to them, are a group of 'handles' from the Indo-Gangetic Divide (Sugh, Naurangabad etc.) which also show a moulded female figure, usually with her hands in *añjali.* The latter plaques however, are usually curved, and it seems likely that they were used as handles and not vertical projections on jars. Yet both the style and iconography of the pieces are similar, and moreover, show the addition of moulded plaques to wheel thrown ceramic wares. They might well show regional variations in wares that were being used for similar purposes. Some of these pieces have, whether in the Northwest, or Indian Haryana been dated archaeologically, scientifically through thermoluminescence tests[51] and stylistically, to the Kuṣāna period. Although they were made later than the parameters imposed on the present study, the continuity in the general style and the use of the moulding in subsequent periods is noteworthy.

Although the next major category of images of female figures seen in association with other elements such as birds, children and attendants are commonly found in Mathura and as far east as Chandraketugarh, there are many that have been found in the Northwest as well. However, neither are the Taxila ones as well preserved or as finely executed as those further east. Most Taxila figurines with birds hold them in up to their chest in the proper left hand and

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[49] Harle, *op. cit.* Fig. 10 (male conch shell figure). For the Pompeii ivory see an illustration in colour in Sivaramamurti, C., : 1977, Fig. 102, p. 168 and as the subject of an article by During-Caspers: 1979, pp.341 – 53.

[50] See Khan, F., Knox. R., *et al.*, *op. cit.*, figs, 5a,b, 6 and 7, also Harle, JC, 1991, *op.cit.*, figs. 7,8.

[51] One of the 'Akra' pieces in the Ashmolean (No. 1967.80) was thermoluminescence tested and it was estimated that the piece had been fired between 850 and 1400 years ago, see Harle, JC.: 1991, p. 650, fig. 7.

are shown wearing a tight fitting lower garment.[52] In a few examples the lady can be seen seated on a stool in the European fashion with a bird held in folded arms. In the examples of the 'mother and child' type, the figure carries a boy, on her left hip, his legs straddled across her waist. She wears jewellery including discoid earrings and a long necklace, and a full skirt which billows into a hoop like form at the base. [*Fig. 3.13*] This is a universal theme in most ancient arts of the world, and scenes of 'mother and child' are seen in a wide variety of media.

Sometimes, female figures in attire similar to the previous group are found along with males who are not present on the relief as diminutive attendants, but as equally important figures. Judging the popularity of these figures in Mathura and Ahichhatra, (from where the inspiration for these plaques may well have come), it is clear that they must be *mithunas*. [*Fig. 3.14*] *Mithunas* are a common feature of Early-Historic Terracotta art and they are found in a wide variety of styles from nearly every site that has revealed early moulded terracotta.[53] The pieces from the Northwest are stylistically closest to the more plain examples from the Upper-Gangetic Valley, as generally, there is an increasing amount of detailing and ornamentation in the examples from the far east of India. A large number of these pieces were excavated at the Bhir Mound at Taxila by Marshall[54]; many of them, were found together, in the courtyard of a house with a pillared hall. Since they were found in a hoard, we may infer, as Marshall did, that they were made to be sold to worshippers, or that they were votive offerings that were brought by devotees of the cult to this structure. At any rate, it is quite plausible that the building where they were found had some religious character.[55] Many of them have been found together with their moulds, which are also made of terracotta. [*Fig. 3.15*] Clearly then, all the terracotta plaques that are found in this region, despite the fact that they closely resemble types from Mathura, were not merely imported to the Northwest, and were locally

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[52] Marshall, *op.cit.*, pl. 132 figs. 17-19 (birds), figs. 23 – 25 (mother and child types).

[53] A discussion on their iconography and relationship with those in other media is discussed in another chapter.

[54] Although he only illustrates two, he says that, "Many specimens of this type have been found at the Bhir Mound, but two examples will suffice for them all." Marshall, *op. cit.* p.449.

[55] Marshall, *op. cit.*,Vol-1, p.98.

produced to cater to the wide appeal the cult(s) this imagery expressed.[56] The pieces usually show the lady dressed in a flowing lower garment and a headdress with a bicornate coiffure, large circular earrings and a long veil that falls down along her torso on either side. The male wears a turban that projects on one side, earrings, clothed in a *dhoti* with his bare torso covered by a shawl and necklace. The figures are of almost equal height and are seen standing side by side holding hands. Apart from a mould in the same style, less elaborate pieces have been found in the Bannu region, clearly then, there was a strong north-westward movement of the styles and iconographic variety usually associated with the Upper-Gangetic Valley. [*Fig. 3.16*]

Male figures are generally less common. In one of the pieces from Taxila, the male stands beside a tethered goat. [*Fig. 3.17*] He holds on to the rope in his right hand. Although the plaque is missing the figure's head, he may well have been attired like the other pieces discovered at the site, in a large turban with a projection to the proper left, a long open (and what appears to be stitched) tunic, necklace and earrings. [*Fig. 3.18*] Examples of such male figures (not necessarily with animals) are found at various sites in the regions of modern Haryana and Punjab, and indeed, even further East. Another similar, and intact, plaque of a male with a goat, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, was allegedly found at Sugh. [*Fig. 3.40*] Two other pieces from Rajghat (Banaras), are in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan. [*Figs. 3.109, 3.110*]

The last category of images that come from the same phase, are those of the seated or standing dwarves. [*Fig. 3.19*] They can sometimes be grimacing, pot-bellied, with wrinkled faces, bulging eyes and large ear ornaments. Marshall does not make it clear whether these pieces are hollow and double moulded, as their well-known counterparts from Kaushambi and Chandraketugarh are. He has however, drawn some parallels with the stone atlantes from Sanchi, and also the obvious links that these figures share with the later iconography of the

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[56] Khan, F., Knox, R., *et al.*, *op cit.* refer to the presence of a similar mould from Akra in the collection of the British Museum.

Yakṣa, Kubera. Considerable variety is seen in the grimacing (grotesque?) dwarves. [*Fig. 3.20*] They can be found holding bowls (perhaps skull-caps), birds, snakes and other reptiles.

Finally, towards the end of the period in this study, we must consider some of the pieces seen at Sirkap that come from the phase of the Śakas and Parthians. Marshall had observed that these figures begin to show a greater amount of Greek influence. This is natural, as late Hellenistic and early Roman art, is known to have heavily influenced the art of this region, which achieved an all together new style commonly known as Gandharan. Extraordinarily though, while these figurines of the early decades of the Common Era appear at first glance to be Hellenistic; as Marshall speculated, it may be more a case where, 'they reproduce under a classical guise, the Indian gods'.[57] This is particularly so in the case of the nude mother goddess figures with which we began our survey. Although the softness of modelling, greater amount of naturalism, the hair dressed in a wreath or fillet and at times the fine diaphanous drapery show the deep inroads artistic influences from the West were making in the Northwest of India; the general posture, nudity, use of moulds, and voluptuously modelled backs of the figures betray the continuity of a tradition already well established in the region. [*Fig. 3.21*] This becomes apparent when we compare them with both, [*Figs. 3.5 and 3.8*] from Taxila, and Wheeler's 'Baroque Ladies' [*Fig.3.3 and 3.4*]. At the same time, one may compare them to naked Aphrodite figures of the third to second century BC.[58] The pieces discovered by Marshall were all fragmentary, however several museums house intact examples, as in the case of the figure from the Gordon Collection in the British Museum [*Fig. 3.22*] or another in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum. [*Fig. 3.23*]

The plaques from **Semthan** show an all together different, local idiom. The limited, and usually surface finds from this site in the Kashmir valley are also made from moulds and are again, generally female figures. [*Fig. 3.24 and 3.25*] The treatment of the plaques however, with figures dressed in heavy and naturalistic drapery, the style of the dress itself, the posture

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[57] Marshall, J.: 1951, pp. 448

[58] Referred to by Poster, A.G.:1986, pp. 117, f.n.3, where she compares the figure to the terracotta naked Aphrodite of c. 200 BC from Taranto in Vafopoulou-Richardson, C.E.: 1981, no.32.

of the figures (often with one bent knee reminding one of western classical contrapposto), the lesser degree of ornamentation, show a parentage that can be traced ultimately to Hellenistic features. At the same time, their faces are more thickly set, with features more commonly associated with Śaka (Scythian) and Kuṣāna imagery.

It is obvious from the above sampling of images, that up until the turn of the millennium, the tradition of small terracotta imagery in the Northwest was informed by a wide variety of influences. While some pieces are clearly the result of a long evolution on local soil – finding few parallels elsewhere, others seem to draw from ancient Mesopotamian and classicising influences from the West. But as far as the moulded plaques are concerned, they look, in large measure, more toward the East, to the Indian Subcontinent and in particular, to sites like Mathura for their inspiration. Not only does the style and iconography of the terracotta point us in this direction, but Marshall's significant discovery of stool querns of Mathura sandstone at the Bhir Mound, has been supplemented with more evidence that shows the interaction between the regions.[59] It seems that it was only after the commencement of the Common Era that a greater amount of Hellenistic influence began to impress upon this imagery. And even then, the shape this influence took, was one that appears to have echoed in 'classically' inspired style, a form and iconography that was, at first, one that was already well established in the region. Yet, this is not a fact that should not surprise us. The ruling classes in the period under study were, after all, of Greek, Parthian, Scythian and Yueh-chi extraction. Further, in examining the influence from the West, the region of Gandhara is found closely linked to contemporary developments in Central Asia, (as seen in the largely Bactrian sites of Dalverzin Tepe, Ai Khanum, Kalchayan, Takht-i-Sangin etc), which had already developed a very sophisticated artistic idiom that incorporated Greek, Iranian, Central Asian and Indian influences[60]. Even the sites of the Indian Northwest Frontier, when explored only from the

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[59] Marshall, J.: 1951, Vol. I, p. 103; Vol. II, pp. 486 – 87. See also Khan, M. Ishtiaq :1966, pp. 41-49. The links between Mathura and Gandhara are the specific foci of other studies as well, see for instance, van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, J.E. 1972, pp. 27 – 43. Although most of these studies are concerned with the interaction between the two regions in the Kuṣāna period they refer also to he Śaka- Parthian and Indo-Greek periods as well.

[60] For a recent overview of the extent of western classical influence in these regions see, Boardman,J. : 1994, pp. 75 – 153.

point of their urban planning or 'major' / 'high' early Buddhist art in stone also show a greater experimentation with Hellenistic forms[61]. The art-history of the region in most standard texts seldom looks beyond the Greco-Roman influences active in Gandhara. Yet, with their close link with Gangetic Valley styles, the moulded terracotta bespeak a slightly different chronology for the interpenetration of Western ideas in the Northwest[62]. Perhaps because these small, private items of worship made in terracotta were the expressions of a faith not as dominant as Buddhism, they were a less obvious focus for the attention of the new artistic styles. It was only towards the end of the period under study here, that the new, and perhaps more popular influences began to percolate to the terracotta figurines. The range of influences and types of the terracotta manifest a different sort of ideal from their stone or stucco contemporaries. An ideal, expressed in a more common, inexpensive, mass-produced, and perhaps more personal or private expression of Early-Historic faith(s).

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[61] In terracotta this is seen in the addorsed animal pillar capitals that owe more to Iranian prototypes than Indian, or in the example of the terracotta Corinthian pillar capital from Sirkap (Marshall, *op. cit.*, pl.135, fig. 126 and 127).

[62] This point has recently been alluded to by Boardman, John, :1994, pp.76-77. He says, "While architectural monuments and their associated sculpture may be secure in their location, they are seldom secure in their date, and the many more mobile objects that we have to consider are perplexing in terms of both origin and date."

II. IN TRANSITION:

THE INDO-GANGETIC DIVIDE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ROPAR AND SUGH

The Indo-Gangetic Divide is located between the two great river systems of India, the Indus on the West and the Yamuna on the East. The Shivalik hills form its Northern boundary, the dried up course of the Ghaggar in the Rajasthan desert in the South and the Aravali ridge reaching up to Delhi in the South East. The region has been known to have been in constant habitation for millennia, its highly fertile plains forming a granary for the North and Northwest. The region also lies on one of the most historically well established trade routes, connecting Mathura with Taxila. Its wide-open plains and riches have lured successive waves of migrations and invasions. All these factors have made the Indo-Gangetic Divide a fascinating area that is both spatially and culturally in transition between the better known centres of Mathura and Taxila lying on its extremities. Archaeological excavations in the region however, have been few, perhaps because it remains a densely populated, cultivated area. This section aims to discuss some of the Early-Historic (200 BC – AD 100) moulded terracotta sculpture from some sites in this area, including Agroha, Sugh, and Naurangabad in Haryana and Ropar in Punjab. I will concentrate on Sugh and Ropar, which are relatively better documented archaeological sites, with a view to sharing with the reader some remarkable pieces lying in both public and private collections and further, suggest that the sculptures from these sites form a distinct idiom within the broad post-Mauryan style.

What remains to be studied in the following analysis is a consideration of material lying on the Pakistani sites of the Indo-Gangetic Divide. Archaeology in the Divide is largely a post-Independence development and far greater work seems to have been undertaken and published in India than Pakistan in this respect. International, as well as Pakistani attention to archaeology in modern Pakistan seems to have concentrated more on the North West Frontier than on Western Punjab. There must of course be an equal number of sites in the latter region, that would have historically formed a continuous chain of habitation from the sites on the Indian side of the border up till the NWFP. We can also assume that there must be

undiscovered sites in West Punjab, as sites like Ropar and Sunet are relatively close to the current International borders. It is hoped that at a later date more research and field-work will be conducted in those regions.

Among the better known sites in the Divide, **Agroha** (in Hissar District) was excavated over a number of seasons[63] and has shown a sequence back to NBPW.[64] As regards ancient historical material, Agroha has revealed a few brick structures of the late Kuṣāna – Gupta period, various terracotta objects and a hoard of Indo-Greek and other coins. The legend "*Agodaka Agaca janapadasa*" on the coins has established the identity of Agroha with ancient Agrodaka.

The sequence at **Ropar** (30° 58', 76° 32') has often been taken as representative of the Early-Historic cultural picture in the Indo-Gangetic divide. It remains the best known site in the region, and the most extensively excavated. The site was excavated by YD Sharma on behalf of the ASI from 1952-55.[65] Stratigraphically, Sharma divided the site into six periods. Period III at the sites initiates the Early-Historic phase (600-200 BC) and forms the predecessor or foundation on which our period of study is built: i.e. the early part of Period IV (200 BC – AD 700). Ropar has revealed a large number of objects that form a valuable and reasonably securely dated reference against which we can better understand the material from Sugh. Although the limited excavations at Naurangabad,[66] Sanghel,[67] Sanghol[68] and Sunet[69] have revealed other interesting artefacts, few Early-Historic terracotta have been found there.

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[63] After the initial explorations by Rodgers in 1888-89, the site was re-excavated by HL Srivastava in 1938-39 (Srivastava, HL: 1952). Also mentioned in *IAR* 1978 –79: 68-9, 1979-80: 31, 1980-81: 15-16.

[64] NBPW (Northern Black Polished Ware) is usually taken to mark the commencement of the Historical period at sites in Northern South Asia; and has become one of the most ubiquitous features of Subcontinental archaeology. The ware is characterised by a lustrous black slip, burnish and glaze and is most popular in Gangetic Valley sites. In 1977, 415 sites that produced this ware were recorded. (See Ghosh, A. (ed.): 1989: p. 251 – 257.) It can be found from different stratified levels at each site, showing that it was in use at different periods in different places. The generally assumed time-span for this ware is between 600 – 100 BC, and since we can not narrow its period of production down its dating at each site has to be judged on its own local merits and peculiarities. For our purposes however, it is important to note that evidence for NBPW is available at almost every site that has revealed post-Mauryan terracotta, showing that the site had been previously inhabited and that the culture of moulded plaques rose on sites with an antecedent history.

[65] *IAR* 1953-4: p.4; 1954-5: p. 9 and Sharma, YD: 1955-56:pp. 21 – 29.

[66] In District Hissar, Haryana, most finds from the site have been collected from the surface.

[67] In District Gurgaon, Haryana. Sanghel is a small PGW and Early-Historic site.

Sugh (30° North latitude and 77°23′ East Longitude) is four kilometres East of Jagadhari in Haryana. Although it has received little scholarly attention, and only three or four of the terracottas published, material from the site has been known from the days of Sir Alexander Cunningham's initial explorations in the 1870s when he identified Thanesar and Sugh with ancient Sthāneśvar and Śrughna.[70] The richness of this site is testified by the fact that pieces from this site began to enter private collections in the early part of the 20th century. (Some of the artefacts housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, can now be ascribed the provenance of Sugh. These were collected by Coomaraswamy between approximately 1915 – 22.) The site was taken up for excavation under Suraj Bhan on behalf of the Dept. of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Panjab University in January 1964 and October 1965.[71] Sugh is one of many sites in the Divide that deserve further attention. Only a small part of the original site lies preserved. A monastery in the south-west of the present village of Sugh has been reported, as has a stupa at Chaneti village (3 km. north-west of Sugh), both built of burnt brick.

The earliest reference to ancient Śrughna is found in Pānini's Aṣtādhyāyi.[72] More contemporary with the Early-Historic moulded terracotta however, are the several references to the city in Patañjali (III – 2.15) and the Mahābhārata which show that it was a known and active ancient city. Further, H. Tsang gives us an account of the city, saying that it had lost its erstwhile grandeur, but was still the capital of the *Su-Lo-Ki-No* country: a large area extending on either side of the Yamuna under the Shivaliks. From the nature of excavated material and from the literary sources available, it becomes clear that this must have been an important Early-

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[68] In District Ludhiana, Punjab and famous for the Kuṣāna Mathura red sandstone images that were found perfectly preserved here. Period IV has revealed some Śunga terracotta. *IAR* 1968-69: p.25, 1969-70: p. 31, 1970-71: p. 30, 1971-72: p. 39.

[69] Also in District Ludhiana, Punjab. An Early-Historic site, with a few early terracotta pieces that are stylistically consistent with others from the rest of the Divide. *ASI – AR 14,* pp. 65 – 67, *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal* 8, pp. 177 –78.

[70] A. Cunningham, ASI Report, Vol. II, p. 226-227, 317; and 1963 (reprinted): p. 290

[71] Suraj Bhan : 1977 : pp. 1 – 49. Also, *IAR* 1963-64: 27-8, 1965-66: 35-6

Historic site of India, and one that we know little about on account of the limited nature of the excavation.

The excavation conducted in the 1960s laid emphasis on vertical digging and revealed continuous occupation over three periods. The lowest, Period I is divided into two sub phases: 'Ia' and 'Ib'. The former dated to 500 – 400 BC had limited finds of both Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and (NBPW) along with grey and black slipped ware. Despite the limited nature of these findings, their presence allows us to seek similarities with comparable ones in the Ganga Valley and further, establish that the antiquity of sites in the Divide can be traced to the commencement of the historical period along with the rest of the Subcontinent.

Phase 'Ib' has been dated from 5/400 – 100 BC. Most of the finds tie in well with Post-Mauryan finds from across Northern South Asia. This is the most prolific phase at the site and the one from which most of the terracotta discussed here hail. The discovery of a large number of dateable silver, gold and copper coins, including those of Menander and Antimachus, the Indo-Greek kings, tie up not only with Indo-Greek coinage found in Ropar, but also establish that this entire region was well connected with both the Ganga Valley and the Northwest. A Kuninda coin has also been discovered here, it bears the legend *'Kādasa'* in early Brahmi characters. These coins date the upper levels of this period to a post-Mauryan, pre-Kuṣāna phase. The material remains correspond with Period III at Hastinapur and at Ropar.

The terracotta of 'Ib' is characteristic of what is usually called the 'Śunga' period. It bears a look of well fired burnt orange, made of reddish clay found in the Yamuna bed. The pieces tie in with the tradition of moulded terracotta plaques of post-Mauryan North India. No mould has been found from the site yet. Apart from the excavated objects many have been collected from the surface, and lie in several private collections. The most important of these is that of Swami Omanand Saraswati of the Gurukul, Jhajjar. Other surface collections from the site, which had begun to be made even with Cunningham's explorations, have been making their

[72] Aṣtādhyāyi- I.III.25; IV.386.

way into private collections for close to a century. However, on account of the meagre publication of excavated terracotta with a secure provenance from this region, collected and purchased pieces are often incorrectly labelled. Some of these pieces will be discussed later in this section. The excavated material lies mostly with the Panjab University, the Chandigarh Museum, at the site itself under the charge of Haryana State Archaeology and one well known, published piece in the collection of the National Museum, Delhi.

In describing the terracotta from this site, as with the others in the Divide, art historical terminology has often resorted to loose definitions: "Śungo-Kuṣāna", "Śunga-Scytho-Parthian", "Maurya-Śunga transitional"[73] are commonly found descriptive terms. These defining labels have been coined after carefully examining the style of the plaques which simultaneously show Śunga, Kuṣāna, Mauryan and Scythian features – hardly surprising as all those cultures were active at different points between the second century BC and first century AD. However using those dynastic labels is misleading as neither were the dynasts the patrons of the terracotta images and nor was the style solely dependant on their influence. While style is an invaluable tool in dating, unfortunately our appreciation of the terracotta plaques from the Divide has been conditioned by the better known and widely published contemporary sculptures from the periphery of the Divide: i.e. Taxila and Mathura. In order to both date and stylistically appreciate these pieces we will have to look more carefully at the archaeology of these sites, compare individual pieces with associated finds from the Divide itself, in addition to the usual dating techniques that are already in practice. The following sampling of some of the pieces from the region has been selected to show this stylistically transitional nature of these figurines and tease out the distinctive and independent nature of the region itself. As a corollary, we will also try and compare pieces in order to date them.

MALE FIGURES:

[73] Suraj Bhan, *op. cit.* p.34-35.

THE SUGH CHILD SCRIBE: The small fragmentary terracotta in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, [*Fig. 3.26*] shows the lower half of a seated boy. The piece is pressed out of a mould, a trend to which most Early-Historic terracotta were disposed. The boy is nude but for the heavy jewellery that adorns him. He is seated on the ground with his left knee raised, supported against which he holds a writing slate (*takhtī*) in his lap.[74] Interestingly, the *takhtī* looks similar to those used to date. More important however, is the inscription on the slate which the boy is in the process of writing.[75] Palaeographically, the form of the letters is in keeping with Early-Historic (approximately 200 – 50 BC) Brahmi. Chhabra has identified the inscription as the Brahmi *Dvādaśakṣarī*, or what is colloquially known as the *Bārākhādi*, i.e. a group of twelve letters of the syllabary. Although the writing is not clear in each of the four lines, we can make out that the boy is practising the letters, repeating them in the same order in every line. [*Fig. 3.27*] The inscription can be read, and shows the ten vowels of Sanskritic languages, along with the *anusvāra* and *visarga*.[76] Epigraphically this is significant, because not only does it present us with evidence of the order of the syllabary as it was known at the time, it is also the order in which it is learnt to date in India.

This remains one of the only published pieces from Sugh so far. Suraj Bhan has reported the presence of another similar piece that was discovered from the surface. Among the more exciting discoveries during the field-work for the present study were twenty more identical pieces that have all come to light from the surface at Sugh. I had the opportunity of studying them in several different collections, mostly private. The largest group is in the collection of the Gurukul at Jhajjar in Haryana [*fig. 3.28, 3.29*]. These were personally collected by Swami Omanand Saraswati from the surface of the site. In Public collections, barring the National Museum, another identical piece lies in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, (No.27.132) [*fig.*

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[74] Published: B. Ch. Chhabra : 1970: pp. 14-16

[75] I am grateful to Prof. J. Clifford Wright (SOAS) for his patient lessons which introduced me to early Brahmi and for reading the inscriptions on some of the other pieces from Sugh which are now in the collection of the Gurukul Jhajjar. These pieces also carry the Brahmi syllabary. In fact on one of them, it seems that although two lines are missing on the slate, the syllabary is complete from '*ka*' to '*śa*'.

[76] Chhabra has also noted that the inscription lacks *ṛ*, *ṛi*, *ḷṛ*, and *ḷṛi*. He says that this probably substantiates Bühler's view (Bühler, George: 1959 (reprint): pp. 16-17) that these four letters did not form part of the original vowels and were included at a later date.

3.31] collected by Coomaraswamy in the early part of the last century. The piece was accessioned as early as 1927. Since comparable pieces were not known at the time when Coomaraswamy collected the piece, its provenance could, so far, never be definitely ascertained. Most of these surface finds are, unlike the National Museum's piece, intact. All the pieces bear an inscription on the slate. Although the pieces are identical in respect of their iconography, it should be made clear that they are not all imprints from the same mould, as there is variation in their sizes and inscriptions. What is clear however, is that this was obviously a popular theme which, until now, seems to be exclusive to Sugh.[77]

In the better-preserved pieces, we can see the boy's head. He wears a turban which has a rounded bulge on the left, a style that he shares with other contemporary depictions of terracotta male figures from the rest of the Subcontinent. In some of the pieces a small elephant is shown in relief beside him. Most of these pieces have an acanthus like foliate sigmate motif of a vertical petal between two curved ones. The motif is often found on terracotta from Sugh. (See *Fig. 3.30* where the feet of a goddess rest on a large lotus where this motif is carefully placed below her.[78]) In examples of the 'child scribe' type, the motif is sometimes scattered with the rest of the flowers around the boy and also, as in the National Museum's piece, on the base of the image where it alternates with a small rosette. The motif is similar to others found across the Ganga Valley and even in the Northwest. However it seems to be particularly popular with the terracotta artisans of Sugh, as it is found prominently worked on several pieces from that site.

Chhabra mentions that in Sivaramamurti's opinion the iconography of this image is that of Krishna as a child at the *Lipiśālā* while at the hermitage of his guru Sandipāni at Avantipura.[79] This attribution rests on the identification of the small floral motifs on the base of the image with symbols usually seen with the later manifestations of Vishnu. These motifs have been

[77] There are of course strong similarities between the terracotta of Haryana and nearby UP, particularly between sites like Agroha, Sugh and Mathura. With further investigation it is possible that such a piece should be discovered in the Mathura region. For the moment however, the largest group with a secure provenance are all from Sugh.

[78] See also Poster, A.G.: 1986: No. 34, which has perhaps incorrectly ascribed to UP or Eastern India.

taken to be lotus (*padma*) and *śrivatsa* symbols. However, both these motifs are a part of the common lexicon of the early sculptors' decorative repertoire. They abound in the entire gamut of Early-Historic art whether in 'Śunga' terracotta or the stupa railings of Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodh-Gaya or Amaravati. The mere presence of these symbols then, cannot be taken to be marks of Vishnu every time we see them used.[80] Secondly, their presence on the pedestal does not show either a possession of, or personal involvement with these symbols. We cannot therefore, consider them unconditionally, as attributes. Further, while the cult of *Vāsudeva-Krishna* is undoubtedly emerging in this period, his clear association with "Vishnu" is tenuous. Besides, iconographic aspects of *Bāla-Krishna* are associated more with mediaeval *Bhakti* cults rather than Early-Historic aspects of *Bhagvatism*. Considering the current state of our knowledge on pre-Kuṣāna cults, for the moment we can only concur with Chhabra that it is a toy.

MAN WITH TALL HAT: Another piece that was excavated from Sugh (now in the Chandigarh Museum, No. 199-31) is a mutilated terracotta bust of a man wearing a tall cylindrical hat with large hoop shaped earrings. [*Fig. 3.32*] His facial features have been rubbed down. The piece can be fully appreciated in the perfectly preserved example that was collected from the surface of the site, in the collection of the Gurukul, Jhajjar. [*Fig. 3.38, 3.39*] Despite it being a moulded terracotta relief plaque, the piece has the appearance of being sculpted in the round. This large (23 cm. high) plaque of an important personage with a potbelly and thickly pleated robes stands tall without any support, on the sculpture's own feet, making it appear more three-dimensional. His left hand is akimbo and his right hand holds an object just below his necklace. Two features immediately stand out in the piece: His costume of thick fabric which is

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[79] Chhabra, *Op. cit.* p.14

[80] Writing in a similar vein, Coomaraswamy once said of symbols in Indian art that, "the meaning must be understood in connection with the context." Further, he said, "If we take the symbol for a sign, we are reducing thought to recognition." (Coomaraswamy, AK: 1956, p. 127). Symbols in Indian art are carefully thought out devices, which are the subject of much secondary study that has shown that these symbols were not meant to mean everything associated with them, every time they were used. (The lotus for instance, alludes to prosperity in the hands of Indra, detachment with Parvati, the umbilical cord connecting creation and preservation with Vishnu, a standardised and most essential metaphor for pure, pink, productive Lakshmi.) See Bosch, FDK: 1960, (reprinted- New Delhi, 1994); Coomaraswamy, AK, *ibid.;* Zimmer, H.: 1946.

stitched into a cloak like garment (made evident by the presence of sleeves), and his tall hat with a pattern of tiered repeating half-moon curves and rosettes.

Stylistically, like the small boy from Sugh, this piece can be bracketed with both "Śunga" and "Kuṣāna" pieces. The heavy drape, stitched garment, tall headgear, wide open eyes and thick lips point to a style seen in Scythian or Kuṣāna influenced examples. Yet immediate post-Mauryan terracotta are known for their almost invariable use of moulds [*Figs. 3.41, 3.200a, 3.201a*], and both the child scribe and the tall regal male figure are particularly fine examples of that technique.

MALE FIGURE WITH GOAT: A piece in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford [*Fig. 3.40*] shows a fully moulded figure, which is comparable to pieces from Rajghat and Taxila.[81] This figure wears a commonly found open cloak and sands largely nude, his left arm holding the animal's horn, the right clutching the lead to which the goat is tethered. His jewellery include the usual bracelets, a thin girdle of a single row of small circular medallions, earrings and a necklace akin to the 'two-triratna and central bead' type seen in numerous examples from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. However, none of these bear the detailed treatment usually reserved for jewellery further east. Unlike the other iconographically similar pieces however, he wears a zoomorphic headdress with a pair of eyes. In some of the later manifestations of Shiva, the god can either lift an elephant carcass or dance inside it (*Gajāsura-samhāra-mūrti*). In both cases the beast's head is seen over Shiva. However, such iconographic forms of Shiva are not known before the sixth century AD, and any speculation on the Shaivite affiliation of this piece will have to wait till more conclusive evidence comes to the fore. The figure might also be carrying a small purse or dagger attached to his girdle.

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[81] SS Biswas (1981: pl. LVIII) illustrates an identica piece from Tamluk (in the Tamluk Museum) with the same headdress, tethered goat and dagger attached to the man's belt. He identifies it as *Lubhdaka*. The similarity between them would urge us to look more closely for a provenance further East for this piece. Similar pieces from other regions have been discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

FEMALE FIGURES:

While some of these pieces may leave us in some doubt regarding their date and style, there are others, which are typical of Early-Historic terracotta from across the Subcontinent. The most common of these is the largely undifferentiated and iconographically consistent goddess usually found standing with one hand akimbo, the other holding an attribute. Her round smiling face is almost always topped with an elaborate bicornate headgear with a central floral medallion above her forehead. She wears large discoid earrings, and typically, the artist shows one of them laterally. Her diagnostic feature is the possession of weapons in her hair. Though there are usually five weapons, sometimes six, ten and twelve are also found. It was on account of the more commonly seen five weapons in the headdress that Stella Kramrisch suggested the iconography to be that of the *Apsaras Pañcacuda*.[82] This has been rightly questioned subsequently, and although her iconography has still not been deciphered, what seems clear is that she is a quintessentially Early-Historic goddess.[83] Although pieces of this type are commonly known at Eastern Indian sites, they have been found in Ropar and Sugh as well, [*Fig. 3.42*] showing that the imagery of the region was part of a widespread cult across the Northern part of the Subcontinent from Bengal through Panjab to the NWFP.[84]

Along with the stylistic features these goddesses share with their eastern contemporaries, certain features seem to be more popular in this region. Emphasis is given to not just the weapons in the hair but also to the finely detailed sprays of foliage that spring from either side of the bicornate headgear [*Fig. 3.43*]. These are usually quite large in relation to the size of the figure and at times, as in *Figs. 3.44 & 3.45* from Sugh, the artisan has taken care to show stalks of different flowers which are arranged one on top of the other. The bodies of these reliefs also exhibit fine detailing and care has been taken to show pleated diaphanous robes that cling to the figure [*Fig. 3.46*]. Another plaque, illustrated in the 1986 Catalogue that

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[82] Kramrisch, S: 1939: pp. 89-110.

[83] This criticism has been voiced several times and recently by Bautze, JK: 1995: p.13.

[84] A comparable terracotta example from the NWFP, housed in the V&A and bronze ones from the Bannu region have been discussed earlier.

accompanied an exhibition of Indian terracotta,[85] has been attributed inconclusively to Northern or Eastern India. Considering the aforementioned pieces, it shows all of the above stylistic features, which we are now able to associate with the local idiom of Sugh. Considering the above features, *Fig. 3.47* makes a strong case to be attributed the provenance of Sugh. Exceptionally well preserved, the plaque is fired to a rich burnt orange. The goddess's clearly represented weapons are off set against a floral spray. Despite being a moulded plaque, the piece stands on its own pedestal. A diminutive pot-bellied attendant carries a basket of offerings covered by a palm frond in the corner.

Another noteworthy female figure comes from the surface of Agroha. Sculpted in the round it shows a graceful *Yakṣī* with a bunch of fruit held in her right hand which falls by her side and the other held akimbo [*Fig. 3.48*]. There is a slight flexion in her body, with a bend in her right knee and tilt to her head that give the image a gentle movement. Her typically 'Śunga' jewellery includes an ornament on her forehead, twisted ear ornaments[86], a large flat band shaped necklace, a broad girdle and multiple bracelets and anklets. Although a small terracotta, the piece exhibits some of the finest qualities of Early-Historic workmanship as seen on several early stone *Yakṣī* figures.

Toy Carts and other Miscellaneous Pieces:

The type of objects in this region is quite typical of any of the Early-Historic sites in Northern India. Various animal figures have been excavated, some of them are relief plaques and others which are in the round are finely moulded toy carts similar to ones commonly found in sites along the Ganga and including Kaushambi, Chandraketugarh and Tamluk. The Chandigarh Museum (No. 4995) [*Fig. 3.49*] has one such toy cart front that is shaped like a ram, albeit with a slightly bovine face. The entire body of the animal is finely stippled. On his head, in between his horns, is a pronounced medallion. Some interesting examples of wheels

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[85] Poster, A.G.: 1986, Colour Plate 4, catalogue No. 34, p. 103

[86] This jewellery is typically found on other sculptures of the Śunga period. Actual examples of similar ear ornaments are of course well known as the Kronos earrings in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum,

that would have fit on either side of these toys have also been found at Sugh [*Fig. 3.50*]. Unusually (and exclusively to Sugh), they can be decorated with elaborate floral patterns.

Returning to the question of dating the pieces from the Divide, we can see that even with the few pieces discussed here, it becomes clear that this is a fairly typical sampling of the types of terracotta sculpture that we would expect from an Early-Historic site. Importantly, they are made from moulds [*Fig. 3.41*], which seems to be the favoured technique for manufacturing images right across the Subcontinent in the immediate post-Mauryan period. In addition, we have here some ubiquitous 'Śunga' style pieces, as seen in the images of ladies with weapons or foliage in their hair, toy carts and even some narrative scenes.[87] [*Fig. 3.51*] Also veering toward a pre-Kuṣāna date are the Brahmi inscriptions on approximately twenty small slates held by terracotta children from Sugh. In addition, there are other pieces which show influences that are usually taken to be exclusively Kuṣāna, but which are more likely to be pre-Kuṣāna, Scythian (Śaka) and Parthian as with the long faces, tall conical hats and thick folded and stitched garments seen in *Figs. 3.39* and *3.41*. Another such fragment, [*Fig. 3.52*] shows the legs and feet of a male figure, dressed in a fine and diaphanous pleated lower garment, showing it has been made from a fine 'Śunga' mould; yet the figure wears sandals that immediately point towards influence from further west, usually seen in the Subcontinental mainland in the early centuries AD. The fact that these influences are pre-Kuṣāna is further attested by the associated archaeological finds of coins bearing the names of Indo-Greek kings which are usually dated from the middle of the first century BC to mid first century AD. Considering its geographical position, this has been a region that has transmitted influences between centres in the Ganga – Yamuna Doab (like Mathura) and the region west of the Indus (Gandhara and Central Asia). Both archaeologically and stylistically then, the Early-Historic phase at these sites betrays a composite quality: a slightly earlier introduction of Northwestern Indo-Greek and Scythian influences that coexisted with the remnants of the

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New York (No. 1981.398.3,4) [*fig –3.301*] and the large gold beads and pendant in the Cleveland Museum [*fig. 3.300*].

[87] There is an interesting but weathered narrative scene from Sugh in the collection of the Department of Ancient History, Art and Culture, Kurukshetra University, Haryana (No. 500). It shows a group of figures huddled before an architectural frame. [*Fig. 3.51*]

immediate post-Mauryan style commonly seen in the Ganga valley. Like their counterparts in the rest of the Subcontinent, the sites in the Divide, were equally vibrant ancient politico-economic, religious, and spiritual centres with a definite urban consciousness and artistically a region with a distinct style. A style recognised by its very transitional nature. It is this fermenting of Indian and extra Indian impulses that characterises the artistic flavour of the Indo-Gangetic Divide in the Early-Historic period.

III. UPPER-GANGETIC VALLEY:

HASTINAPUR, MATHURA, SANKISA, KANNAUJ, AHICHHATRA, SAKET-AYODHYA, KAUSHAMBI, BHITA

As soon as we come into the geographical sphere of the Gangetic valley, the number of sites increases dramatically. These sites were obviously related to one another and part of a flourishing network of human settlements along the river and in the land watered by its tributaries. Each of these sites has revealed enough antiquities, including Early-Historic terracotta, to warrant an investigation into each site separately. Many of the sites are documented, some better than others of course, and there are still more awaiting exploration, let alone excavation. Excavations, or perhaps better termed as diggings-for-antiquities in the area are known from the middle of the nineteenth century. Much secondary literature on the region is therefore available; in terms of art-history it mostly concerns the celebrated Kuṣāna stone sculpture. Our purpose is not to undertake an in-depth analysis of one site alone. Rather it is to tease out the essential flavour of the terracotta assemblages from a variety of sites, bring out the broad regional style and, more importantly, the conceptual underpinnings / ideological concerns that inform the terracotta art of this region as a whole. The analysis of the style and the archaeological data available, will allow us to address the chronology of these pieces, which remains, so far, dependant on rather more speculative studies. Moreover, such an exercise will allow us to further contextualise the terracotta art of this region within the broader contemporary artistic oeuvre of Early-Historic Northern South Asia.

As we have already noted in the introduction to this chapter, it is to be expected that sites such as Mathura, which lie in the North-western portion of the Upper-Gangetic Valley, and which border modern Haryana (Gurgaon District) naturally show affinity with the terracotta of the Indo-Gangetic Divide. Similarly, artefacts from Kaushambi show a gradual movement away from Mathura and start showing correspondences with Eastern Indian material.

The Upper-Gangetic Valley in terms of modern political divisions, is the region that occupies most of Uttar Pradesh (UP), excluding the sub-Himalayan mountainous regions of Kumaon and

Garhwal, and the peninsular and South-eastern parts of the state. In other words, we address here the Early-Historic sites of Hastinapur, Mathura, Sankisa, Ahichhatra, Ayodhya, Kannauj, Kaushambi and Bhita. There are of course many more sites, but the terracotta assemblages from there merely replicate what is evidenced in the aforementioned sites. Besides, we have more detailed references to the archaeology of the above sites, affording us at least an attempt at contextualising these plaques.

Ahichhatra once the capital of Northern Panchala, with its numerous mounds first attracted archaeological attention under Cunningham,[88] and subsequently by Führer.[89] Stupas, and a reliquary were found at the site by Cunningham; unfortunately no trace of the former can be found there anymore. The site is most celebrated for its large brick Shiva temple of the Gupta period. It is also well known for some exceptional terracotta friezes and sculptures, again from the Gupta period. Less well known, are the Early-Historic terracotta from the site, which have been the subject of a monograph by VS Agrawala.[90] While a large number of them are surface collections, those that can be securely dated come from the careful excavations conducted by A Ghosh and KN Dikshit during 1940 –44.[91] The latter excavations identified nine strata of habitation at the site. Stratum VII, VI and V, are early Historic (roughly 200 BC – 100 AD), and yielded coins of the Panchala rulers of the first century BC and the earliest baked brick structures. This is also the period when grey ware and NBPW fade at the site, instead large quantities of red ware and terracotta figurines start making an appearance.

Crudely fashioned handmade figurines with bird or animal heads are commonly found in level VII. Moulded plaques also appear alongside. For the most part the moulded plaques show a man and woman standing beside each other and have been classified by Agrawala into *Mithuna* and *Dampati*.[92] Also typical of the period are the terracotta votive tanks that have

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[88] Cunningham, A., *ASI – AR*, 1, pp. 255-66.

[89] Führer, A.: 1969 reprint: p. 26.

[90] Agrawala, V.S.: 1947 – 48, pp. 104 – 79 (reprinted 1984).

[91] Ghosh, A., *Ancient India*, 1, 1946, pp. 37 – 40; also by the same author: 1989 Vol. 2: pp. 7 – 9.

been found with unidentifiable female divinities affixed within or above them. However, some other pieces, such as the hollow double-moulded ones, which can be found from our period in most other sites in the region, are seen here in Stratum III, which has been dated by Ghosh to AD 350 – 700. Equally peculiar is the associated find in Stratum III of beads of faïence that are known to have been more popular in the late centuries BC – early centuries AD, which means that they ought to have been found between strata VII - V. Excavations at the site were renewed in 1963 – 65 by NR Banerjee in the more ancient sector of the site, however these have not altered our information on the terracotta assemblages.[93] The terracotta assemblage at the site can be closely compared to what has been discovered in the environs of Mathura, and as will become clear in the following discussion, the archaeology too (barring the two peculiarities discussed above), almost mirrors the stratigraphic order of what is seen at the other sites in the rest of the region.

Hastinapur (29° 9', 78° 3') lies close to the Ganga, on its western side, in modern Meerut District. Like the other sites in this region, not only is it well documented archaeologically, there are numerous references to the site in ancient Indian literary texts. The Mahābhārata mentions it as the capital of the Kuru. In Jain literature it is the place from where the *tīrthankara* Ṛṣabha hailed and also a site visited by Mahāvīra. The results of the excavations at the site by BB Lal between 1950 – 52 were reported by him in 1955.[94] He excavated two main mounds at the site that were originally part of a single inhabited area. As it was not possible to conduct broad horizontal excavations, neither the exact spread of the site nor the nature of its urban planning could be ascertained. It also seems that in the Early-Historic period the river was closer to the site than five miles away, as it is at the moment. The vertical trenches establish that the Early-Historic phase at the site begins with Period III (600 – 200 BC), but of concern to us is the next stage, Period IV, which has been dated roughly between the second century BC to the third century AD. Period IV began literally on the ashes of the preceding

[92] This classification is not entirely satisfactory and is discussed later.

[93] Banerjee, NR.: *IAR*, 1963-64, p. 43; *IAR*, 1964-65, p. 39.

[94] Lal, BB.: 1955: pp. 6-151.

stage (a widespread fire seems to have ended period III), and is divided into seven structural levels. The buildings are made of burnt bricks in this phase unlike the mud bricks seen earlier, this is in keeping with a general archaeological pattern in the Subcontinent.

Ayodhya (26º 48', 82º 14'), the fabled birth place of both, the epic hero-king Rāma and two Jain *tīrthankaras*, a site visited by the Buddha; it finds repeated reference in the literary and oral traditions of India. To verify these textual claims, the site was excavated in a small way by two different groups. Initial excavations were conducted by the Banaras Hindu University, and the terracotta plaques they discovered remain in the collection of their Department of Ancient History. More elaborate excavations were initiated by BB Lal in 1978. These have shown that once again, the site seems to become a more vibrant centre along with the levels where NBPW is found. Particularly fine quality NBPW was revealed at the site in steel grey – blue, or even with a silver or golden sheen. Among the over two hundred terracotta antiquities Lal discovered is a small grey figure which he claims might be the earliest Jain figure known so far.[95] The Early-Historic moulded plaques are similar in conception to those from Kaushambi (and to a slightly lesser extent, Mathura) in their general style. At the same time, some of the pieces may be fired to a dark charcoal – steel grey, at times breaking into a lustrous black. This unusual feature seems to have been more common here than at other sites.[96] Perhaps, it is to continuities with the strong NBPW firing techniques that we ought to look to explain this local predilection.

Another interesting discovery was of Rouletted Ware from first – second centuries AD levels. This ware is known to have been popular in sites in the Southern and Eastern parts of the Subcontinent that had extensive maritime trade relations with Rome. The international trade with Ayodhya must have taken place along the river Sarayu (which joins the Ganga further downstream at Chhapra), on which the site is settled.

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[95] Lal, BB, "Ayodhya", in A. Ghosh (ed.): 1989 vol.2: pp. 31-32.

Mathura (27°31'; 77°14') along the river Yamuna, is one of the most celebrated archaeological sites in India, and also one of the most problematic. References to the site abound in ancient literature, whether secular or Buddhist, Jain or Brahmanical.[97] To a great extent, the city's importance rests on its claim to being the birthplace of Krishna, and this continues to make the city one of the principal pilgrimage sites for *Vaiṣṇavas*. The material evidence from the region comprising a prolific sculptural tradition harking back to at least 200 BC and continuing without any break through the Kuṣāna, Gupta and post-Gupta periods, underscores the long historical importance of the site. It is however as the eastern capital of the Kuṣānas that the site has attracted the most attention. The art history of Mathura is based not on the material discovered from the confines of the ancient or modern limits of Mathura City, but refers instead to the sculpture from the Mathura sphere of influence, which seems to have extended far beyond the city limits. The name 'Mathura' is therefore used generically to describe an artistic style that spanned a very broad area, and in the case of stone sculpture seems to be limited to pieces that are fashioned from a characteristic pink-reddish spotted sandstone found in this region. For terracotta however, it is difficult to use the same yardstick. This is because 'Mathura' style terracotta are closely related to those from Ahichhatra, Bhita, Kaushambi, Sugh, Sonkh, etc. not all of which have revealed Mathura stone sculpture.

The archaeology of the Mathura region is seriously wanting. Despite its overwhelming importance, it has not been possible to conduct any serious horizontal excavations, as most of the region is built up and remains inhabited. Further, it has been subjected to endless unscientific rifling in the hope of retrieving valuable Kuṣāna stone sculptures. In the process, large amounts of (mostly unwanted) terracotta sculpture were also discovered. In fact, terracottas are still being found in the region, but unfortunately, being surface finds, the task

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[96] Although a dark grey to black appearance is common in Mauryan terracotta particularly from Mathura, this finish and clay type seems, by and large, to wane in Post-Mauryan times. It is seen to continue only in a limited fashion in the Upper-Gangetic valley, Ayodhya being a key site in this respect.

[97] Refer, for instance, to the copious and highly informative literary references collated by Law, BC.: 1954: pp. 106-10; Dey, NL.:1971 reprint: pp. 127-8; Chakraborti, HP.:1966: pp. 169-173; Srinivasan, DM. (ed.): 1989. (Also in the same volume, see an article by Romila Thapar, "The Early History of Mathura: up to and Including the Mauryan Period", Srinivasan, DM. (ed.):1989:pp. 12-18. The article looks at textual sources, Vedic and Puranic, and correlated material from Greek, Latin and Indian Epic sources with the cautions necessary in their use.)

of dating them is dependent on style and comparisons with other excavated sites. Of the few excavations around the site, the following have been instrumental in furnish us with the only scientific information we hold about the area's archaeology.

In 1862 Cunningham identified nine mounds in the area, however he concentrated on the Katra and Kankali Tilas as they held the most promise of revealing stone imagery.[98] An attempt at mapping the geographical extent of the site and the nature of its urbanisation was undertaken by Stuart Piggot in 1945.[99] A few years later, in 1954-55, M. Venkataramayya and B. Saran's cuttings limited to the Katra Mound showed the area had been inhabited from roughly 600 BC – 600 AD.[100] Between 1973-77, MC Joshi conducted the next, and latest excavations at the site itself.[101] The objective of his excavations was to examine the antiquity, growth and character of Mathura City. Again, on account of the heavily built up area, it was not possible to conduct horizontal digging. As per Joshi's chronology, the terracotta discussed here, should fall mostly within Period III (200 BC – late first century BC) and into the early levels of Period IV (early first to third century AD). Although there do not seem to be many excavated terracotta from the site, the ones that have been found do have a stratigraphy behind them, and this is useful in order to be able to date the vast quantities of surface collections. Several levels have also revealed relatively more securely dated punch-marked coins. Combining the information we have been able to collate through the numismatics, urban planning, nature of bricks and types of ceramic wares, we can ascribe with more accuracy a date to the terracotta, which had so far been dated only stylistically.

As with other sites, entirely hand modelled animistic images with bird and other zoomorphic heads began to be made at Mathura before 300 BC and continued into the first century BC, if

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[98] Cunningham, Sir Alexander: 1966 reprint: pp. 13-46. For a survey of the many other 'archaeological' explorations around the site conducted before 1910, (some of which were in truth expeditions to rifle for antiquities), see Vogel, J. Ph.: 1910. Vogel's study incorporates the explorations by Cunningham, Hardinge, Burgess, Growse, Führer, Vogel himself, Radhakrishna and others.

[99] Referred to by DK Chakrabarti: 1997: p. 190.

[100] Venkataramayya and Saran: *IAR*, 1954-55: p.15.

[101] Joshi, MC., *IAR*, 1973-74, pp.31-2; 1974-75, pp. 48-50; 1975-76, pp. 53-5; 1976-77, pp. 54-6. See also essay in Srinivasan DM (ed.): 1989, and in Ghosh, A. (ed.): 1989 Vol. 2: pp. 283-86.

not later. Figurines of reduction-fired grey clay fashioned into elephants (with or without riders), females with large lotus shaped medallions on their headgear with moulded faces atop modelled bodies (often decorated with stamped and applied motifs) were popular from the mid third century BC to the early first century BC. Fully moulded plaques in a variety of shapes and forms usually date between *c.* 200 BC – AD 100. However, towards the end of the latter time frame, the style of combining modelled and moulded forms begins to grow popular again, only with more thickly set facial features – with images that are more bold in their style rather than the more decorative fully moulded plaques.

Sonkh (27°37'North latitude and 77°30' East longitude), about 30-km south west of Mathura shows a very similar archaeological assemblage. The site was excavated by a German mission led by H. Härtel. His complete report encapsulates, comprehensively, the proceedings and implications of the excavations since 1966.[102] The excavation revealed eight periods of habitation spread over forty stratigraphic layers. They stretch from the lowest phases of Black and Red Ware (BRW) and Painted Grey Ware (PGW) (the earliest occupation at old Sonkh being approximately 800 BC)[103]all the way up to Mughal and Jāt occupation that seems to have ended probably around 1770. Concerning us here are the periods II, III and IV, i.e. ranging roughly from level 36-23. Admittedly, this includes the Early Mauryan phase, which is not our area of focus. However, in studying the terracotta art from this period onward, we are able, conclusively, to see a clear historical development of style and iconography. And since this is one of the few sites where a nearly linear progression of the style is traceable, it allows us to assess the innovation in the moulded plaques in the light of their antecedent history, setting up a model for the chronological development of terracotta arts that is unfortunately not as clearly represented at other sites. Further, as this is one of the few extensively excavated sites that closely mirrors the assemblage at Mathura, we can use the dating and archaeology of the site as a marker against which the antiquities from the rest of the region can be compared. A summary of the chronology and archaeology of the site follows, which should help us contextualise the terracotta that are studied alongside.

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[102] Härtel, H.: 1993.

A strict separation in the soil type from yellowish to grey in level 37 marks the commencement of the occupation of the Early Mauryan phase at the site, corresponding with the start of Period II. PGW and BRW sherds cease in level 36. NBPW, typical Maurya period figurines and contemporary die-struck coins also appear after level 36. It is also after level 36 that greater evidence of constructed walled architecture is traced. These are however, small rudimentary parts of walls made of mud. This leads gradually, through the presence of limited parts of mud structures to level 29, (which coincides with the arrival of the Mitras of Mathura in approximately 100 BC), to a phase when a more 'urban' character at Sonkh is witnessed. Level 28 marks the commencement of Period III (shortly after 100 BC). The last stages of Period II, i.e. levels 32-30, have been called that of "Śunga Cultural Phase" (third quarter of the second century BC). However, Härtel makes it clear that we have to be cautious using this phrase, as we do not know if the Śungas did in fact rule the region of Mathura. What is clear, is that we can assume a change in the general cultural assemblage on account of the development of the terracotta figurines which (between levels 33 – 30) start manifesting, according to Härtel, "Śunga" features.[104] Significant also, are the associated coins found with the plaques which allow us a more secure tool to ascertain their date.[105]

Most of the terracottas are, once again, of female figures. There is no specific context or attribute that will allow us to distinguish who these figures are immediately. It has been suggested in the past that they are mother goddesses, but they have not been found with children and Härtel therefore questions VS Agrawala's identification of these figures as *Aditi* or some other aspect of the Earth Mother.[106] He mentions that although many of the pieces show richly adorned and beautiful ladies, for obvious reasons we cannot use the name '*Surasundari*' either, as the latter are known to us largely from mediaeval sculpture.

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[103] *Ibid.* p. 85.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] For instance, see Härtel's section on coins, particularly nos. 4-6, which show a lion before an *Indradhvaja*, and nos. 7-49 that show punch marked copper currency dated to this period. *Ibid.*

The Early Mauryan terracotta at Sonkh are governed by the same ideals and motivations as the rest of the Mathura region. Stylistically too, they conform exactly, to those seen at other sites. They invariably have hand modelled bodies with moulded faces. The faces have large eyes, with a strong outline, rounded noses and a gentle smile. Apparent, for instance, in *Fig. 3.53*, which was excavated from level 33-32 at Sonkh[107] and *Fig. 3.54*, from Katra Keshav Deo in Mathura District.[108] In addition, their faces often have a double string of pearls arranged horizontally over the forehead, with their hair divided by a parting in the centre. The other pieces of jewellery, streamers and rosettes, are pressed out of moulds or punched with some decorative device and subsequently applied on to the figure. The body of the figure is modelled by hand. [*Figs. 2.24, 2.25* in previous chapter] Not all the excavated faces were parts of complete figurines, it seems some of them may have been applied on the shoulders of pots.[109]

The relatively rare and varied male figures have all one feature in common, which is the bulge of either their hair or turban on one side of their heads (usually on the left). This is a well-known convention for male figures which continues into the first century BC. All the 'Mauryan' types are generally made of grey clay with a black slip.[110] Reddish brown ones begin to appear more frequently at the end of the 'Śunga Cultural Phase', and these are usually fashioned as completely moulded plaques.

It is well known that the plaques we are discussing in this study are usually called 'Śunga'. Yet, as Härtel's excavations at Sonkh have shown, much of what has traditionally been called Mauryan seems to extend into what is called the period of the "Śunga Cultural Phase

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[106] *Ibid.* p. 88

[107] Härtel, *op. cit.*, fig. 13, p. 95

[108] In the collection of the Mathura Museum, (No. 34.2372) h. 6.5 cm, photograph © AIIS (355-95).

[109] See for instance, Härtel, *op. cit.*, no.15, p.96. We have already mentioned the presence of pots with figures on their shoulders in the NWFP (Akra). Related, perhaps, to the same trend, are the numerous moulded handles for pots, that usually show figures in *añjali,* that have been found across Haryana, in some sites in Rajasthan and UP. Usually the latter are date to late first – second centuries AD.

[110] See, for instance, Härtel, *op. cit.* fig. 1a, p. 94, which is an Early Maurya piece from Level 34 at Sonkh,, and although modelled, follows closely a style, that was to become conventional soon after.

(SCP)"[111]. This shows us, yet again, that the term Śunga does not at all imply necessarily a complete shift in style from partly moulded to fully moulded terracotta. In fact, there was only one fully moulded plaque that was found between level 33-32 (third quarter of second century BC), which corresponds with the earliest level of SCP [*Fig. 3.55*].[112] It shows a female figure with a child. The greater preponderance of fully moulded terracotta come from what are called the Mitra and Kṣatrapa levels, and even there we should not be surprised to find a few partly-moulded-partly-modelled pieces. Clearly then, we should be talking more in terms of date, and archaeological levels, rather than dynastic labels.

Although the inappropriateness of word 'Śunga' to describe the style of the plaques has been discussed earlier, we are confronted again, and ever more glaringly, with this problem when we discuss the terracotta art of the Mathura region. In discussing the general history of the Mathura region, BD Chattopadhyaya has remarked, "There is no direct evidence of Sunga rule in Mathura... Historians however, indiscriminately use the dynastic label Sunga for the immediately post-Mauryan cultural phase at various archaeological sites."[113] We have already noted Härtel's reluctance in using the word with regard to his excavations at Sonkh. A more general note that explains the political history of the region can be found in Chapter 1 of the present work.

A gradual development is seen in the later figures, after level 30 (i.e. at the end of the SCP), where they are more profusely decorated and largely moulded. Level 28 is taken as the period where we see the start of the political domain of the Local States of northern India, and Mathura at this time apparently passed into the control of the Mitra rulers at the end of the second century – early first century BC. Härtel says, "the terracotta plaques showed signs of an emancipation as if they wanted to establish an off-from-the-Śunga movement."[114] The faces become more rounded rather than oval, with a more deeply modelled brow line, plump

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[111] Härtel illustrates this through figs. 42, 44 and 46, p.99and fig. 58, p.108, *op. cit.*

[112] Härtel, fig. 18, p. 96, *op. cit.*

[113] Chattopadhyaya, BD in Doris M. Srinivasan (ed.): 1989: p. 20.

cheeks, a vertical line near the edges of the mouth is more noticeable, the pearl border on top of the face is divided into two, set at angles that meet on top of the middle of the forehead rather than one continuous string and very often, below it, ladies seem to wear a cap that has a rectangular part cut away in the centre of the forehead. [*Fig. 3.56*][115]

At the same levels, there is a conspicuous arrival of fragmentary terracotta votive tanks, and terracotta seals and sealings. The latter show symbols or names inscribed in Brahmi. Among the associated finds were two coins, which carried the legend "*Gomitasa*", indicating that they were issued by Gomitra, the first of the Mitra rulers of Mathura. By level 27, the buildings are made no longer of mud brick but burnt brick. Gomitra seems to have ruled for only a short while, as this level has revealed a few coins of the next ruler, Sūryamitra.[116] The following two levels 26 and 25, have revealed coins of the Mitra successors Brahmamitra and Viṣnumitra. The other Mitra ruler, Dridhamitra's coins were not fund at Sonkh. Although establishing the precise dates and reigns of these rulers seems impossible at the moment, we should note that Purānic texts second the fact that Mitra rulers succeeded Śungas in this region. Not that this is any way relevant to the social, iconographic or artistic history of the terracotta, if we do, all the same, feel compelled to ascribe a dynastic label to establish a chronology, it seems that the Śunga influence on the region waned in the last third of the second century BC and the Mitras held sway for most of the first century BC with some incursions by Indo-Greek rulers like Demetrius from the Northwest.

Barring two types, the dwarfish male figures and the so called 'tribal figures' all other images of humans have been found in specific contexts, and their styles are period-specific. These former two categories show little variation in style and are found across different periods and are therefore evidence for continuities between broad time spans. This trend is largely true for the votive tanks as well, although there does seem to be some progression in them from plain rectangular ones to those with elaborate shrines and circular wheel thrown ones. At the same

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[114] Härtel, *op. cit.*, p.85.

[115] Härtel, *op. cit.*, Fig. 20, p.96

time, there are continuities that can be traced from the early Maurya imagery through to what is seen in the Kuṣāna period. Coming back to Sonkh, it is the terracotta of Period III that corresponds most closely with the types of assemblages of moulded terracotta plaques that we wish to study.

Historically this period covers the time from the close of the 'Sunga Cultural Phase' to the end of the Mitra dynasty of Mathura and the appearance of the Kṣatrapas. 55 objects were found from stratified spots that belong to Period III. Other associated objects can be grouped with these for several reasons including stylistic ones. Technically, there are three types of terracotta from this period. The most common being the moulded plaque, with a flattened back, pressed from an open mould. These are viewed upright, made from red clay that may fire in various hues of an orange-red to buff, they can sometimes carry a slip and are of the type that we are already familiar with from sites in the Northwest and the Indo Gangetic Divide. [*Fig 3.57*] Second, are the free-standing handmade figures. They can, like their Period II (Maurya) predecessors, have moulded faces. Commonly they are riders, although pieces are found which appear to be shaped as three legged figures (akin, at least conceptually to figures from Buxar in Bihar, discussed both in Chapter 2 and later in Section IV of this Chapter), or rarely, as figures with wings. On the whole, they are all more crudely fashioned. *Fig. 3.59* is a three-legged sculpture from his region in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In its continuity of partially moulded features the terracotta tradition still bears connections with the pre-existing styles of figures popular in the Mauryan period. The excavations at Sonkh, and some other sites have shown the presence of part modelled – part moulded figures from Kuṣāna levels as well. Clearly then, while the technique seems to have been most popular in the Mauryan Period, it should not be taken as the only distinguishing feature for dating the pieces. Third, the last type found at Sonkh in this period are double-moulded figures that may or may not be hollow. The hollow ones are nearly always covered in a white slip. [*Fig.3.59*] shows traces of a white slip and is double moulded and hollow; while [*Fig. 3.60*] is an example of the rarer solid double-moulded type. Hollow double moulded terracotta covered with a

[116] Although a charcoal sample from the level has been carbon tested to give a date of 221 cal BC, it seems that this date is too early.

white slip have so far been studied in their more popular find-spots in the Deccan, dated to the period of the Sātvāhanas in the first to second centuries AD. Although the iconographic predilections of the two groups are varied, they do share the same technique of manufacture. Archaeological and art-historical works that discuss Sātvāhana terracotta distinguish it from the rest of Early Indian terracotta on account of this 'unique' technique of manufacture which was apparently imported from Rome / Alexandria during a period when we know that the Deccan had extensive trading relations with those parts.[117] If the presence of this technique is viewed as one that could have come only from Rome, then how do we explain its prevalence in North India before the Common Era? Should we then assume that Rome had trading relations with North India before the widespread trade with the Deccan? An obvious solution would have been to assume that these figures should be dated to the late first century AD, in which case we could have imagined that the technique spread from the Deccan to the North and the East. But the dating of these pieces at Sonkh at least is quite secure, and we can not therefore follow that line of argument. This problem will be referred to in more detail in the section on Eastern Indian terracotta, where it seems that hollow double-moulded slip-covered were equally, if not more popular.

Period IV (*c.* 25 BC to mid first century AD) corresponds with levels 24 and 23, and these come under the phase of the so-called Kṣatrapas of Mathura. The coins in these levels belong to the reigns of Hagāmāṣa, Rajuvula and Sodāsa. Curiously, a coin of Rāmadatta (a monarch of one of the broadly contemporary Datta dynasties) has been found along with the Kṣatrapa ones. None of the other ostensibly fifteen Dattas' coins have been found here. From level 23, we have a seal impression which reads "*Anangabālasa*" or, 'of Anangabāla'. The inscription is biscriptural- i.e. in both Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts. [118] This is a useful clue that points to the eclectic nature of the culture in this period.[119] The period has been very broadly dated to the end of the first century BC and into the first century AD.

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[117] See for instance, Poster, A.G.: 1986: pp. 114-15.

[118] Härtel: 1993: p.304.

Once again, we are going to avoid falling into the same trap, and refrain from calling these terracottas Mitra or Kṣatrapa. The chronology of these dynasties is ridden with many problems. If we rely on numismatic or epigraphic sources, we end up with a genealogical sequence that would appear to be about 300 years long for a period [the duration] of which should not be more that 150. Even if we do accede that this region was at various times under the influence of these dynasties, we will have to agree with the recent researches of Härtel and Chattopadhyaya that the constituent parts of the Mathura region must have had several foci of authority. These were probably under the control of different Dattas, Mitras or Kṣatrapas, many of whom may have been contemporary with each other.[120] At the same time, textual sources second the fact that the region was also exposed to incursions by the *Yavanas* from the Northwest.[121] The close affinity between the Northwest and Mathura region can be seen through a number of biscriptural Kharoshti – Brahmi inscriptions at Mathura, the presence of early Mathura sandstone objects at Taxila and, as we saw in Section I of this Chapter, in the overwhelming stylistic parallels between the terracotta arts of Mathura and the Northwest. The Mathura region then, was already widely exposed to the Northwest in the Mauryan and immediate post-Mauryan periods, contacts which seem steadily to grow and intensify during the first century BC and continue to increase until they reach their zenith during the reign of the Kuṣānas. Stratigraphically too, the terracotta that we are discussing here seem to fit within these dates, not merely in the Mathura region, but also, as we have seen in the Northwest and in the Indo-Gangetic Divide. [122]

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[119] Biscriptural inscriptions are discussed in greater detail, in the section pertaining to the chronology of moulded terracotta in the Lower-Gangetic Valley and eastern India.

[120] See Chattopadhyaya, BD.: 1989: p. 20; and Härtel, H.: 1976: p. 83.

[121] See the textual references in the *Yuga Purāna, Gārgi Samhita* and Patañjali's *Mahābhāsya* cited by D.C. Sircar: 1974: pp. 1-16 and by the same author in 1972- 73: pp. 168 – 173. See also, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (ed.):1957: pp. 153-54. In addition we know of the well-known inscription of Khāravela at Hathigumpha of the second half of the first century BC which mentions that the Yavana King retreated to Mathura faced with Khāravela's onslaught.

[122] Although the phase of the later Kuṣāna inhabitation in the area is not within the parameters of our study, it is worth noting that Sonkh has revealed some exceptional Kuṣāna finds. These include sculptures of stone and terracotta, some of which are inscribed, large numbers of coins of different Kuṣāna kings, and among the structures, an apsidal temple. Interestingly, a Mathura red-sandstone image of a goddess was found at the base of the temple from a securely stratified level.

Kaushambi (25° 20', 81° 23') is the other major site in the Upper-Gangetic Valley that has revealed hundreds of Early-Historic moulded terracotta plaques. It is located 51.5 km southwest of Allahabad, on the banks of the Yamuna. The site is enormous, spread over several villages covering more than eight square miles. The habitation area included a large fortified area, but the city spilled over the fortified boundaries. The site was identified as Kaushambi by Cunningham,[123] further excavations near the Aśokan pillar at the site were conducted by NG Majumdar in 1937-38, but the results were not published. GR Sharma and his assistants undertook the most systematic and extensive archaeological excavations at the site from 1949-50 to 1966-7.[124] His latter excavations pushed the dates of habitation at the site back to approximately 1165 BC, the start of the 'revised' dates for Period I.[125] Four distinct periods were identified by Sharma, of which the latter portion of Period III (605 – 45 BC) and the early decades of Period IV (45 BC – AD 580) are of interest to us for their terracotta assemblages.

While various aspects of the archaeology of the site have been questioned after the excavator's passing, the limited references needed to date and contextualise the terracotta plaques of the Early-Historic period are quite secure. Kaushambi, like the other sites in the Ganga Valley, had already been inhabited for a long period before it began to produce anthropomorphic imagery in the form of moulded terracotta. Fortified with bastions and gateways in its high walls, enclosing extensive living quarters, streets and drains – this was a

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[123] *ASI – AR* 1, p. 306; and 1963 (reprint, Varanasi): p. 330-35.

[124] GR Sharma: 1969. Also, *IAR - 1953-54*, p. 9; *1954 – 55*, p. 16; *1955 – 56* , p. 20; *1956 – 57* , p. 28; *1958 – 59* , p. 46; *1959 – 60* , p. 46; *1960 – 61* , p. 33; *1961 –62* , p. 50; *1962-63* , p. 32; *1963 – 64* , p. 40; *1966 – 67* , p. 38.

[125] Sharma's dating methods for the site, have been seriously questioned subsequently. Ceramic assemblages are one of the most critical dating tools for the archaeology of the Subcontinent. Sharma linked some of the earliest wares with Late and Post-Harappan ones at other sites. Yet, many important 'types' of post-Harappan wares are missing from Kaushambi. At the later stages too, he does not seem to have accounted for the contemporary presence of NBPW and PGW, and the possibility of a later arrival of NBPW at the site. Equally questionable is Sharma's suggestion that coinage at Kaushambi commenced in 900 BC, which as has been pointed out by KS Ramachandran, is a date that would "revolutionise the world history of coined money"! (See Ramachandran, KS, in A Ghosh (ed.): 1989: p.215, and Chakrabarti, DK: 1997: p. 194-98 for further references to a criticism of Sharma, and a summary of the principal arguments. See also, Dev Prakash Sharma: 1989: pp. 55 – 65, again for a summary of the fundamental debates that exist around the dating of the early occupation of Kaushambi, particularly the proto-Historic period. He outlines the history of the arguments mentioned by others. Like other authors however, apropos the terracotta, he offers no significant alteration of the chronology, and regards them as 'Śunga'.)

supremely 'urban' centre. Its urban nature highlighted by the presence of inscriptions on the pillar and seals, the use of luxurious NBPW and a monetised economy.

Sharma identified an enclosed space outside the fortified rampart as an altar for Vedic sacrifices. It is made of brick and shaped like a flying bird (eagle?) with its head facing southeast which, Sharma says would have been use for the *puruṣamedha* or human sacrifice, apparently conducted by the founder of the Mitra dynasty in Kaushambi. However, whether this structure was an altar at all, is questionable.[126] Various Mitra coins have been found from corresponding levels at the site. These are also the levels that have revealed moulded terracotta. Whatever the function of the 'altar' may have been, the terracotta can be dated stylistically, stratigraphically and by comparison with the numismatics found alongside. Once again, we come to the same spectrum of dates, from the late second century BC to the early first century AD, for their use and production.

Kaushambi is an often-mentioned city in ancient Indian literature.[127] According to the Mahābhārata, the Kuru capital was transferred to Kaushambi by Nichakshu when Hastinapur was washed away. Around the sixth century BC, it was the capital of Vatsa, one of the 16 *Janapadas*. It is said the kingdom was ruled by Udayana at the time, who is known to us as the romantic hero of several literary works.[128] Interestingly, a group of moulded terracotta images discovered at the site, are said to narrate one of his stories. This has been discussed later. Hiuen Tsang mentions that the site was visited by the Buddha, and this is indeed likely. The Allahabad pillar was probably originally situated at Kaushambi, it shows that Aśoka had posted one of his important Mahāmātta officials at the site. Also according to Buddhist texts, three bankers, Ghosita, Kukkuta and Pavarika, all disciples of the Buddha, built a retreat each for their Master at Kaushambi. Hiuen Tsang also mentions these retreats. The identity of one

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[126] See Lal, BB: 1985.

[127] Detailed literary and epigraphic references to the city can be found in NN Ghosh: 1935; Law: 1939 and in GR Sharma: 1969: pp. 4 – 10.

[128] Such as the Pali *Udena-vattu*, the Sanskrit *Makandikavadāna*, *Meghadūta*, *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Svapna-Vāsavdattā*, *Pratijña-Yaugandharayana*, *Ratnāvali*, *Priyadarśika* and the *Brahma-khanda* of the *Skanda*

of these, Ghositarama, was identified during Sharma's excavations by the presence of an inscribed seal bearing that name in one of the buildings. This *vihāra* structure probably dates back to the fifth century BC, and includes a large stupa, cells for monks, an apsidal structure, a shrine space (possibly for Hāritī) and a cloistered verandah.

Bhita, also in District Allahabad, is about 22 km up the Yamuna from Allahabad, on the way to Kaushambi. The site was first noticed when railway contractors selected the area to use the stone for ballasting. Cunningham visited the site, and reported it in 1872.[129] Its large mounds were first partially, although systematically excavated by Marshall in 1909-10 and 1910 - 11.[130]

Subsequent explorations there have unearthed some NBPW sherds, and it is quite clear that the site was inhabited at least from the beginning of the Early-Historic Period in the Subcontinent. Chakrabarti has noted that Bhita is the only site in the Gangetic plain that has revealed a coherent picture of urban layout.[131] A house on the "High Street" dated to the Mauryan period, might have been that of a guild of artisans and traders. Marshall found a seal there inscribed '*nigama*', the Sanskrit word for a guild. The house has twelve rooms around an open courtyard. Many of the other houses seem like they would have opened into the street, and may have functioned as shop-fronts. Although Bhita may have had trading relations with other cities from an earlier date, several seals of Kuṣāna and Gupta dates have been found at the site. These are both religious and mercantile in nature. The terracotta from Bhita is very similar to material from its neighbouring site, Kaushambi. The excavated pieces are now mostly in the collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta.[132] A number of later terracottas of the Kuṣāna and Gupta period have also been found there. The site, it seems, met its demise in the

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Purāna. He finds mention also in the Jain *Vividha Tirtha Kalpa*, *Lalitavistara* and Tibetan Buddhist literature. See list in Sharma, *op. cit,* p. 7.

[129] ASI Report for 1871-72 Vol. III, p. 46.

[130] *ASI-Annual Report,* 1911-12, pp.29, 59.

[131] Chakrabarti, DK: 1997: p. 199.

[132] See, Mukhopadhyay, SK, "Terracottas from Bhita", 1972, pp. 71-94.

changing patterns of habitation and settlement after the Huna invasions of the early sixth century AD.

Kannauj (27° 3′, 79° 59′), in District Farrukhabad of UP (near modern Kanpur), is situated on the south bank of the Bhagirathi river, near the confluence of the Ganga and the Kali. The site is of course celebrated for its post-Gupta stone sculptures, but it finds mention as an ancient city in literature. Brief excavations in 1955 showed up some PGW, Black and Red Ware and NBPW.[133] The terracotta discovered at the site, dates from the third century BC to the twelfth century AD. The Early-Historic moulded terracottas are most similar to material from Sankisa, although affinities with Kaushambi, Ahichhatra and Hastinapur are also strong. Stylistically, many of these terracottas can be given a slightly later date, as they often show a greater amount of Śaka-Parthian and Kuṣāna influence.

STYLE, ICONOGRAPHIC VARIATION AND CHRONOLOGY

FEMALE FIGURES:

The early moulded plaques of females from levels 29-28 at Sonkh wear their hair in a tripartite arrangement. The rectangular cut in the cap or geometric arrangement of the hair on the forehead is commonly used. [*seen first in Fig. 3.56*] This feature seems to be fairly widespread, we have already seen examples of the type from the Indo Gangetic Divide, and there are others from sites such as Kaushambi and Chandraketugarh. At Sonkh, by level 27, the cap with the rectangular cut in the forehead is no longer obligatory and the headdress tends to become less decorative.

Several other types of headgear are also found in the region. Commonly figurines wear their turbans or their hair in a tripartite arrangement consisting of lateral bulges and a flower in between or on top. Kaushambi, Mathura and other sites in this region also, at times, show another minor variation to this style, where the headdress is entirely or partially composed of

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[133] *IAR*- 1955-56, p. 19.

large feathery projections. [*Fig 3.60, 3.61*] *Fig 3.57*,[134] from Sonkh, was excavated from Level 27 (Mitra) shows a figure with two pronounced lateral bulges on her head with a high central feathery projection in between. These are not to be mistaken for goddesses who consciously sport weapons in their hair. The projections may well be fronds of foliage, probably grain, which would be in keeping with their general role as goddesses of fecundity.

An unstratified piece, *Fig. 3.63*,[135] from Dig Darwaza in Mathura District, now in the collection of the Mathura Museum (No. 59. 4748) shows a lady with an unusual hairstyle where the hair is arranged in finely plaited braids that fall to her waist. The plaque is moulded in high relief, and shows the figure in a graceful stance, her head bent gently to her left. Her right hand falls by her side holding an object that cannot be seen clearly, while the other is supported at the girdle across her hip. A row of beaded segments fall from the girdle neatly between her legs. Her jewellery is unusually sparse, but finely executed. This includes large disc earrings, a short necklace with a prominent central stippled bead pendant and bracelets. Another identical piece from Kaushambi, is in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 22178).[136] [*Fig. 3.64*]

Other less frequently represented types of headgear include the one seen in *Fig. 3.65* (Allahabad Museum, No. 3262) discovered at Kaushambi which shows the bust of a lady with her head covered by a thick fabric that frames her and extends over her shoulders. There is a bulge on top of her head, which makes one wonder whether she is wearing an ornament underneath the scarf, not unlike what is still worn in parts of Haryana, UP and Gujarat today.[137] Another figure from Kaushambi, *Fig. 3.66* in the collection of the University Museum at Allahabad, shows a lady wearing a rounded cap or fabric arranged as if it has a fillet beneath. Indeed, not only did the ladies dress their hair in elaborate coiffures, they also wore caps and turbans. This latter feature is not just a 'Śunga' invention but one that was

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[134] Härtel, *op. cit.*, fig. 52, p. 107.

[135] Published, among other works, in Poster: 1986: No. 28, p 98.

[136] Moti Chandra: 1971: pp. 7 –8, fig. 19.

documented even in Mauryan terracotta, particularly from sites such as Bulandibagh and Buxar. *Fig. 3.67* in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 3342) from Kaushambi shows one such elaborate turban overlaid by an intersecting ribbon dividing the headgear into three sections.[138]

While some of these figures discussed above are either too fragmentary or not seen to be holding any discernible attribute, on the more complete figurines in the Mathura region we can see that they follow some sort of iconographic programme. A widespread type is the **female with fish.** Commonly found in other regions as well, (Rajasthan and Kaushambi[139]), it is the Mathura ones that are the most well known. Härtel has illustrated three such figures from Sonkh.[140] These were found to originate as early as Level 29, which has been dated 'Early Mitra' (late second century BC). The fully moulded flat plaques show a female holding two or three fish by a string in her proper right hand. Her broad oval face, with its thickly set features, wide-open eyes with a double incised outline is framed by an elaborate bicornate turban. On her forehead one can see the same rectangular cap / arrangement of hair mentioned above. [*Fig. 3.68*] Over it, there are usually three rows of pearls. The enormous headgear and large face is supported by a slim, lithe body with an exceptionally narrow constriction at the waist, where a belt holds up a lower garment. A broad girdle is fitted across her hips. As is common in the sculptures of the period, she wears other pieces of jewellery too, such as large hoop earrings, a short torque, another long necklace and bracelets.

This type is also known from Chandraketugarh.[141] A mould for such a figure has also been found at Kaushambi.[142] A fairly widespread type, Kala lists numerous museums where

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[137] A similar plaque from Bulandibagh is illustrated in the following section.
[138] Moti Chandra, illustrates the same figure, however mentions a different accession No. for it. 1971: fig. 35.

[139] See Kala: 1980: Figs. 43, 44a, b, and p. 21 f.

[140] Härtel: 1993: figs. 51, 51 a, 56, and pp. 101 – 02.

[141] Ghosh, A.: 1973: *IAR* 1965-66, pl XLV

[142] Kala: 1980: p 21, fig. 44, another mould is housed in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin (No. MIK I 5957)

examples of this plaque are represented, such as Lucknow, Delhi, Allahabad, Cleveland, Musée Guimet, Boston,[143] Baroda and, of course, Mathura, where most of these pieces have been found.[144]

This goddess was first identified in 1936 as *Vasudhārā* by V S Agrawala,[145] although it became the subject of a specialised study by him later in 1939.[146] His attribution however, has been steadily losing followers over the years. Most descriptions of *Vasudhārā* are from a later date. S C Kala feels that since there is no information on the early iconography of *Vasudhārā*, Agrawala's opinion is unfounded. He further says of his view that, " it is untenable because the figurines described ... do not conform to the actual iconographical formulas prescribed for the images of *Vasudhārā*."[147] Instead, Kala feels that Moti Chandra's opinion that this figurine is a variation of the Iranian goddess *Anāhitā* is more credible.[148] P Pal says she may also represent "either the tutelary goddess of fishermen or *Revati*, goddess of fishmongers."[149] Unusually, the terracotta in the Boston collection is one of the few inscribed pieces from the period, and was read by Coomaraswamy as "*Sudhata*".[150] [*Fig. 3.69*] However, the meaning or significance of that word is not clear and does not help us identify her conclusively. *Sudhata*, may, I feel be read as the 'beautiful one who receives' or the 'beautiful one who raises', the word *dhata* being open to both interpretations. Fish can often be associated with fertility, particularly with sexual symbolism. Kala also lists numerous instances, both contemporary and

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[143] Paulson, J.: 1977: fig.24, No.46, p. 35, illustrates and catalogues a piece in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (No. 25.448). The piece is from Coomaraswamy's collection, and was accessioned to the Museum through the Thomas Oaks Rogers Fund in 1925. Published also in Coomaraswamy, AK. :1927(a) : pl. 17, fig.57.

[144] *ibid.* Also see Paulson, J.: 1977: for further references to published examples.

[145] Agrawala, VS: 1936 (reprinted 1984): pp. 29-30.

[146] Agrawala, VS: 1939(b): p 13-17

[147] Kala, SC: 1980: p 22

[148] M Chandra: 1973: p. 1 - 47.

[149] Pal, P: 1987: p 21; The importance of cults of goddesses like *Revati*, rarely seen in later Indian art should not preclude her from our consideration. References to her are addressed in Chapter 4.

[150] Quoted in Paulson, J.: 1977: p. 35.

later, (in stone, terracotta, coins, gold jewellery) that show the fish was a symbol shared by Hindu, Buddhist and Jain iconography, and one deeply rooted in India. Commonly found as an auspicious symbol (*aṣtamangala*) or as a 'mark of greatness' (*mahapuruṣa lakṣana)*; once again, this is a motif that is part of the lexicon of early Indian symbols. And although we do not know its specific intent or reception in Early-Historic India, it is generally thought of as a symbol of fertility and plenitude.[151] Yet again, as with many other terracotta from this period, we find here a figure using a particular language of symbols that we are at a loss to identify. What cannot be doubted however, is that her sculptors were following a convention for the portrayal of a figure type, widespread in the period, following the same iconographic norm across Northern and Eastern India; and that remains, in itself a fact worthy of our consideration.

Fig. 3.70 is another plaque in the same style from Govindnagar in Mathura District, albeit with a different iconography. The piece is in the collection of the Mathura Museum (No. 39.2859), and shows a **lady standing with a palm leaf fan** held in her right hand.[152] This iconography was popular throughout the Gangetic valley, and in particular, the sites of the Upper-Gangetic Valley.[153] Once again, the pieces are quite sophisticated in their iconography and follow the general stylistic treatment that is common to the region. An attenuated body, with an excessively narrow waist supports her large, broad face with its laboured headgear. Fastened quite high on her waist, just below the breasts, is a pleated lower garment that falls to the middle of her legs. While features like the small five weapons in the proper left side of their headdress are shared all across the Subcontinent; the plaques' execution in shallow and hard relief, and the lack of decorativeness differentiate them from those of other regions like the Lower-Gangetic Valley (Bengal).

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[151] These aspects are highlighted by Pal, P: 1986, Vol. I: p. 137, where he mentions that the symbol is associated also with Kāmadeva, the God of love. Further, a pair of fish, or a *mīna-mithuna*, represents completeness.

[152] Published previously by Poster, AG: 1986: No 25, p.96; Agrawala, VS: 1936: fig.31, pl. IX. Poster illustrates another piece in a private collection, *op. cit.* No. 26, p.96.

Less popular in this region, are **ladies with a bird**, usually a parrot, held up to their shoulders. [*Fig. 3.71* - Allahabad Museum, No. 2493] Whether this is a 'religious' iconography or not, is debatable. Parrots are a well known attribute for *Nāyikas* and other semi-divine figures in later Indian art, where they assume the symbolic role of the lady's friend, who either speaks to it, or listens to it endlessly uttering her beloved's name that she never tires of hearing. We are at a loss to know whether such poetic metaphors were in common currency at this time. At any rate, representations of this iconography are more common in the Lower-Gangetic Valley than they are here.

Examples of **figurines with five *āyudhas*** (weapons) in their hair from the Northwest and the Indo Gangetic Divide have already been discussed. The most sophisticated pieces from the Divide came from Sugh: related to their Mathura counterparts in their simplicity but with a decorativeness and sensitivity in their finest pieces that is seldom seen at Mathura. Compare for instance, *Fig 3.47*, from Section 2 with *Figs 3.72 and 3.73* in this section. In general, this iconography becomes increasingly popular as one moves eastward from those regions, reaching their maximum number in Bengal. Their heads are dressed in typical bicornate gear, flanked on the one side with five different weapons and offset by fronds of foliage on the other. Long streamers attached to their hairdo flow down their sides as if framing them at least until their knees – these are the most typical terracotta goddesses from the period. It is also the convention to show these figurines with one large discoid earring / earplug on one side and the same earplug laterally, its length extending out of the ear, on the other. They usually wear a large central circular medallion or knop, fashioned as a lotus bud or central part of a lotus flower directly over their heads. [*Fig. 3.72* – Mathura Museum. No. 32.2241][154] The ones from the northern sites of the Upper-Gangetic Valley (such as Mathura, Ahichhatra, Sonkh) tend not to possess the same delicacy of expression or execution as their counterparts from Kaushambi and Eastern India. *Fig. 3.73* (Mathura Museum 58.4696) from Katra Keshav

[153] See, for instance, Kala, SC: 1980: Fig. 93, No. 198, p. 38, from Kaushambi, in the collection of the Municipal Museum, Allahabad (no. 3213)

[154] a similar plaque, probably also from Mathura was auctioned by Sotheby's London, on 7.July 1986, Lot 285

Deo in Mathura District illustrates this well.[155] Interestingly, the figure appears to be holding a bunch of fruit (perhaps grapes) in her hand, and furthermore, stands within an architectural context, enshrined in an arch simulating the style of wooden architecture which we know was popular at the time. She wears the usual uniform of weapons in her hair, albeit there are only four, and executed in a distinctly different wiry style. There are other noteworthy features in the style of her execution. The shallowness of the relief and its hard-edged quality, already seen in the previous examples from the region are more prominent. Coupled with her attribute of a bunch of grapes, it seems quite likely that this figurine is the product of the admixture of Indian and Scythian influences.[156]

By contrast, figurines from sites further South in the region, such as Kaushambi, show a slightly different quality. With a greater frequency of more finely executed pieces, with gentler features, detailed moulds – these images have a more discernible local form. [*Fig. 3.74*] A commonly found piece from Kaushambi shows a full, frontal image of a goddess standing in a stiff upright posture, arms falling by her side, her feet splayed and consciously placed on a lotus. [*Figs. 3.75, 3.76*] Perhaps, she is a variant of Śrī-Lakṣmī. Once again, she possesses a bicornate headdress with (usually) five weapons; she is richly attired and ornamented. However, she does not seem to carry any attribute. Her costume includes a long stitched coat with full sleeves that hangs down, behind her knees. Just above her breasts, a small collar like projection would have acted as a button or fastener to pull the two lapels together. The coat is lined, as seen in the portion of the garment that falls behind her thighs, or where the lapels have been turned over. The figures always stand with their coats wide open, exposing a type of costume that is more prevalent in the region, and revealing the figure's ample proportions. Her lower garment forms a stiff circle above her ankles. Suspended from her exceedingly narrow waist are what appear to be either folds of fabric or strings to which the tassels that fall on her thighs are attached. A broad beaded girdle across her hips accentuates their width.

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[155] Compare Mathura Museum No. 36.2720 (AX 1/40).

[156] The unusual (in the Indian context) attribute of grapes can be seen in another plaque from Mathura in the Mathura Museum (Accession No. 39.2834).

The pieces all have a hole made in the top centre of the plaque, from which they would have been suspended.

One of the most extraordinary examples of this goddess is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York (1987.42.1). [*Fig. 3.77a and b*] The piece, it is said, came to the Eilenberg Collection from a gentleman in Allahabad who found the piece in Kaushambi.[157] This small, three-dimensional figure sports enormous weapons that almost shoot out of her hairdo. There are three on each side of her head, and between them is a disc with circular bosses placed perpendicular to the head, its flat side facing up. She has a round face with circular earrings. The size of her body is disproportionately small in relation to her face, hands and headgear. The figure's right hand and feet are missing. The left hand, in keeping with the iconography found in the terracotta plaques has her left hand positioned on her hips. This figure too, like the three other bronze examples from the Northwest (discussed earlier), is also small, also meant, probably, for private worship. The cult of this goddess then, seems to be widespread in the 'minor' antiquities of Early-Historic India.

The same goddess can be found in other contexts as well, particularly in the pieces from Kaushambi and those from sites further down the Ganga. *Fig. 3.78* in the collection of the Gurukul, Jhajjar (Haryana) was collected on the surface of Kaushambi. It shows **a goddess enshrined** beneath a large parasol, flanked by two attendants, one of whom carries a fly-whisk. The plaque is damaged, and only the upper two-third survives. Yet, the composition and subject matter is perfectly conventional, with all the vocabulary of symbols that allow us to establish this standardised female figure as an iconographically consistent Goddess. Another piece, *Fig. 3.79* (Brooklyn Museum No. 73.99.10) in the same vein is in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, and can, on stylistic grounds be attributed to Kaushambi. Only the upper portion of a large plaque remains. It shows a goddess below a parasol, with five distinct *āyudhas* in her hair. She is flanked by two *cauri* bearers. Two holes in the plaque indicate that it would have been strung up in a shrine, such as a wall or tree, dedicated for either personal

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[157] The piece is published in Lerner and Kossak: 1991; also see, *Orientations*, Vol. 25, No. 13.

or public worship, (however the former is more likely). The figure herself carries a staff which she holds up. (Although it seems that the lotus above it springs from the staff, this is probably not the case, as numerous examples are known where figurines carry a staff. In cases where they carry lotuses, a curving stalk of the lotus is represented, and not a rigid baton as the one this figure holds.) The stippled border and iconographical features may at first prompt us to attribute the piece to Bengal, but a closer consideration of the style makes it evident the piece must be from Kaushambi. The clay type is more red, rather than cream, buff or light grey as seen in Bengal. The figure is less ornamented, and so is the background of the plaque, which would have been covered with the most detailed stippled ornamentation in its eastern counterpart.

One Goddess who stands apart from all the others, and remains recognisable to date in the subcontinent is **Lakṣmī**. Several images of Lakṣmī are known, and there is considerable variety in them. The variety may be iconographic or stylistic depending on where the plaque was discovered. It is indeed possible, that the plaques from Kaushambi discussed above, [*figs. 3.75 and 3.76*] may well be manifestations of Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī is known to be associated above all, with lotuses and water, both of which feature prominently in the plaques.

Two plaques in the collection of the Municipal Museum, Allahabad (Nos. 2519 and 5218) [*Figs. 3.80, 3.81*] show Śrī-Lakṣmī standing on a lotus (*padmasthita*), surrounded by several other lotus blooms (*padmavāsini*), and holds a lotus in her right hand (*padmahasta*); all of which spring from a water tank. That the tank is a special sacred space, is made evident by the representation of a *vedikā* or fence around it, shown on the bottom register of the plaque. The goddess herself, is unexceptional, with all the usual attributes, coiffure and costume that are commonly found on the terracotta figurines of the period. Important from an iconographic perspective however, is the symbolic context that she has been provided. Standing upon and surrounded by lotuses in a sacred demarcated tank, not only shows the remarkable continuity that this goddess has retained till today, but also allows us to compare her representation with similar ones in stone at Bharhut and Sanchi.

Almost as popular, is the iconography of **Gajalakṣmī**. A small weathered medallion from Kaushambi shows her standing on a full-blown lotus, being lustrated by elephants who flank her on either side and also stand on lotuses. [*Fig. 3.82* – Allahabad Municipal Museum, No.5205) The plaques from sites such as Kannauj and Sankisa can, at times, show a slightly more Kuṣāna style. For instance, an upper portion of a moulded Gajalakṣmī plaque from Kannauj shows the figure with a fuller face, thicker lips and broader nose – commonly associated with the Kuṣāna style. [See *Figs. 3.83, 3.84 and 3.85*] Yet, the eyes are double incised, on her forehead she wears a cap or coiffure with a rectangular cut which were features popular in pre-Kuṣāna terracotta. Similarly, another representation from Sankissa, shows the goddess hold onto two lotuses, upon each of which stand the elephants (symbolic of rain clouds) lustrating her, in keeping with her role of the fertilising goddess of abundance.[158] While their iconography remains consistent, the style and quality of the execution of the plaques vary. A detailed and finely executed piece in the collection of the Mathura Museum, No. 42-43.3041, [*Fig. 3.87*], comes from an unknown site in UP. The background of the plaque is covered with small rosettes of varying sizes, and the arch shaped plaque carries circular bosses along its edge. The decorativeness of this plaque is most unusual for the Upper-Gangetic Valley, where they tend to be plainer, except in the case of certain specific iconographic types. The popularity of his plaque is borne out by an almost identical example in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. [*Fig. 3.88*]

PK Agrawala has published another similar plaque probably from Kaushambi in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 23633, 190/462).[159] In this case, Śrī-Lakṣmī stands under a parasol flanked by two female attendants carrying *cauris*. All three stand on large pot shaped lotus flowers that rise from a water body enclosed behind a railing. Access into the sacred shrine is through a gap in the middle of the *vedikā*, represented again, by a set of steps leading into the tank. Another piece at the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (Accession No. 21938) [*Fig. 3.89*] also shows the same rigid, frontal goddess standing on a large lotus bloom,

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[158] Another plaque from Sankisa in the collection of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (No. 250) shows a Gajalakṣmī. However it is weathered and is executed in a style akin to pieces from Mathura.

surrounded by several others that spring from a tank. Two elephants, as per the iconography, stand on lotuses and pour water on the figure from water pots held in their trunks. The *vedikā* in the lower register of the plaque shows a set of steps leading down into the sacred tank.

Both Lakṣmī and Gajalakṣmī types are frequently found in the Ganga Valley, at sites such as Mathura, Kaushambi, Kannauj, Sankisa, Bhita, Basarh, and Lauriya-Nandangarh. They become even more popular in the sites from Bengal (Harinarayanpur, Tamluk and Chandraketugarh), where they exhibit a local sub-style, and are discussed separately in a following section. Curiously, no plaque with this iconography has been found (as yet) in the Indo-Gangetic Divide or the Northwest.

In *Fig. 3.90* (Bharat Kala Bhavan, No. 20137) also from Kaushambi,[160] another type of context is seen, where the goddess stands beneath an arch. Although the arch is not strictly in the shape of a *Caitya*, it immediately reminds one of the shape of the façade of the Mauryan Lomas Rishi cave in the Barabar Hills, Bihar. *Caitya* arches were a common form of architecture at the time, and one often used for religious structures, as evidenced from numerous surviving examples and also their representation on the reliefs at Sanchi and the western Indian caves. In this fragmentary plaque the divinity stands with her arms falling by her side, in a stiff frontal posture, holding indistinguishable objects. Her facial features, and earrings can be seen more clearly in another almost identical piece, also from Kaushambi, in the collection of the University Museum, Allahabad.[161] These features prompt one toward a more Kuṣāna date, while the sharply angled arrangement of the coiffure over the forehead and the general execution of the plaque prompt an earlier date. One does not always have to look for an architectural context or shrine to establish the 'divine' nature of these figurines. Often they are flanked by diminutive attendants [*Fig. 3.91* - Cleveland Museum, No.1972.259],

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[159] PK Agrawala: 1991:pp. 63-66, fig. 1.

[160] Illustrated by Moti Chandra: 1971: fig. 20, p. 8.

[161] Fragment of an enshrined goddess under an arch, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Allahabad University Museum, Photo © AIIS (No. 618.86)

sometimes the central figure is seen to bless them with her hand over their heads and at other times she stands with a child (male) straddled across her hips. In the latter case at least, her designation as a mother goddess is not unwarranted.

Still other figurines in the region carry attributes or consciously show gestures that we are no longer able to read. There is consistency in their depiction across the entire Gangetic plain, and across scores of pieces; undoubtedly, they are expressing a language. Just like the figures that are seen with birds are not decipherable, the same is true for plaques that show **ladies with mirrors**. These are usually seen in some attitude that would, in subsequent art, easily have been called one of *śrngāra*. Intently gazing into a mirror that they hold, these ladies are usually seen adorning themselves or adjusting their coiffure. A piece from Girdharpur in Mathura District in the Mathura Museum (No. 48.3410)[162] [*Fig. 3.92*] shows a lady seated probably in a wicker chair at her toilet, with one hand adjusting her headdress while she holds up a mirror that she looks into with the other.

Whether such ostensibly 'secular' scenes are trying, to convey another set of semi-divine beings that are no longer known to us, is a matter dealt with at greater length in the following chapter. We can, for the moment, merely empirically expand this typology to include all such scenes, to see if there really is a connecting theme between them. Equally popular at the sites in this region are scenes of music and dance. Sometimes they involve several figures, and at others, show **a single dancing female**. Male dancers are rare even in the complex plaques that show several figures. This group is more popular at Kaushambi than at other sites in the Upper or Middle-Gangetic Valleys. *Fig. 3.93* in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (No. 4767), shows such a lady with her arms raised over her tilted head, with a more than a usual amount of movement in her body, making the beaded bands that fall from her headdress sway to the side.

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[162] Another piece from the Mathura Museum, also made, probably from the same mould, is illustrated by Agrawala, 1936, *op. cit.*, fig 34, p. 31

Adjusting their hair, or **holding on to one of their earrings** are gestures seen in many other plaques as well. The latter feature has elicited some comment from art historians. According to Moti Chandra, this is a special feature of *Śri-ratna*,[163] who is an auspicious female figure associated with the *Cakravartin* monarch and originally connected with *Śrī*, the goddess of prosperity and abundance. Either earring may be held by these ladies, and at times, it seems that they hold on to one of the *āyudhas* in their hair. Coomaraswamy[164] also identified her as Śrī or Lakṣmī. One of these plaques was excavated at Ropar,(illustrated in the previous section, *Fig. 3.42*) in the Indo Gangetic Divide, and it shows the style of that region. This iconography is widespread in Bengal, at sites like Chandraketugarh, from where at least 50 such pieces are known, and are scattered in several collections, private and public.[165]

A plaque of the same genre from Kaushambi [*Fig. 3.94*] in the Allahabad Museum, No. 5396, shows the slim lady with a bare torso, her hair arranged in a large coif directly above her head, with a constriction between the head and the fillet. In both general style and costume, she is exactly like the Chandraketugarh pieces. This shows that the finest pieces from Kaushambi can be at times difficult to distinguish from their Eastern counterparts. However, a few minor differences can persuade us, on stylistic grounds, to attribute it to Kaushambi. The plaque is altogether more weathered and more coarsely executed, and the figurine's jewellery and the background of the plaque does not carry the same degree of stippled patterning or lotus blossoms which is *de rigueur* in the East. Another almost identical piece in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 3360) [*Fig. 3.95*] is also probably from Kaushambi.

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[163] M Chandra: 1952-53, p 28

[164] Coomaraswamy, AK:1956: p 80, fig 98.

[165] Such as the piece in the Neumann Collection, illustrated by Bautze: 1995: pl XIX

MALE FIGURES

At no site in the Early-Historic period do we find more terracotta plaques with male figures than female ones. Despite their relatively limited numbers, there are perhaps, an equal number of different 'types' of male figures as there are any other category. At the same time, the percentage of male terracotta figures in the post-Mauryan period is greater than it was previously.

Some of the plaques from the region show male figures with features like wings or with specific iconographic attributes that can allow us to speculate on their supernatural aspects. Three to four types of **winged figures** are found in the Upper Ganga Valley. The largest group was excavated from Kaushambi. The plaques have attracted the attention of several scholars – Coomaraswamy, SK Saraswati[166], SC Kala[167] and J Auboyer[168] have all speculated on the possible meaning and iconographic importance of the wings, and further, to use them to identify these 'deities'. These views are taken up in the subsequent chapter, here we concern ourselves with merely stylistic, regional and chronological divisions. Kala attempted to collate all known images at the time, and said that there were a dozen known winged figures. Many more are, in fact, published, and scores more available in private collections from this region alone, not to speak of Eastern Indian ones.

A style particular to Kaushambi[169] [*Figs.3.96, 3.97, 3.99*] shows a winged male wearing a horseshoe shaped turban divided into rectangular segments usually topped by two vertical projections - the whole headdress frames the deity's face. He is adorned with discoid earrings, a torque around his neck and a necklace that falls to the middle of his chest. The figure also wears armbands and heavy bracelets. All the figures have a bare torso and their lower (*dhoti* like) garment is bunched-up and folded to form a belt around the waist. In their hands they

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[166] Saraswati, SK :1957

[167] Kala, SC: 1980: pp. 32 – 34; 1993: Museum No. 74.1; 1950: p. 101, (pl.XIV-B), p.177(pl. LI); 1974: pp. 258- 263.

[168] Auboyer, J.: 1981: pp. 158 – 60.

[169] See Auboyer, J.: 1981: fig. 403; Kala: 1980: figs. 76 and 78.

hold lotus stems which break into blooms just below the large curving wings attached to their shoulders. They are broken below the waist, and no complete piece of this type is known; neither are the available pieces of exactly the same size, and as a result, despite their similarity, we cannot assume they were made from the same mould.

The other major style of winged male figure is found right through the Upper and Middle Gangetic Valley. *Fig. 3.99* in the collection of the Mathura Govt. Museum, (No. 42-43-3037) is similar to others in the Allahabad Museum, from Kaushambi [*Fig. 3.100*] [170]and several others from sites in Bihar (Vaishali / Basarh) (these are discussed in the following section). The figures usually wear the more typical Śunga turban with a large circular or oblong projection, the figures are slimmer and less decorated than the previous group. Bunches of feathery wings are attached to their shoulders. Other winged figures, may unusually be seen **seated on a peacock**, as in the piece from Kaushambi, in the Allahabad Museum, No. 5398,[171] or as in *Fig. 3.101* in the collection of the Mathura Museum (No. 39.2849) where the **figure carries a bow**. The background of the entire plaque is covered with small floral motifs and an arrow is placed just below his elbow.

In the case of the latter example, one is tempted to identify the figure with *Kāma*, the god of love. However, other possible interpretations including *Vidyadhara, Kinnara* or even *Skanda-Kārtikeya* and *Sūrya* have also been suggested and arguments in favour of these identifications are equally persuasive.

One of the most interesting terracotta plaques from this period shows a tall **deity trampling a diminutive figure**. The piece is in the collection of the Mathura Govt. Museum, No.34.2552 [*Fig. 3.102*] Although the plaque is broken above the figure's shoulders, it is evident that it was made using a particularly fine mould. The figure wears armbands, bracelets and two necklaces, a shorter one of rosettes and a longer garland that falls to the middle of his chest. His finely pleated *dhoti* is arranged in intricate folds, and a sash knotted at his waist serves as

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[170] A similar plaque is in the Allahabad Museum, No. 571

a belt. In his proper left hand he carries a long bow and holds a bunch of arrows in the right. A border of circular bosses surrounds the plaque and the entire interstitial background is covered with little floral motifs and stipples. Unfortunately, this piece was collected from the surface and its find spot was never recorded. The style of the plaque is quite unlike the other pieces known from the Upper-Gangetic Valley, and is far more refined than anything reported so far from the Northern sites of Mathura or Ahichhatra in that region. It is quite possible that the piece came from a site lower down the Ganga Valley, and considering the sophistication of the pieces from Kaushambi it is not unreasonable to assume that it was made somewhere there. Arguably, the piece could also have been made further afield in Bengal, and might have travelled to UP.

It is a common feature in later Indian art to see a deity suppressing another figure where the latter is usually the personification of a demon, symbolic invariably of ego, ignorance, or some other human failing. There can be no doubt that a similar quality is being expressed by this deity. His posture is stiff and heraldic, he possess weapons as distinguishing iconographic attributes, stands amidst flowers, and tramples an adversary whose lesser importance is underscored by his diminutive size.[172] When VS Agrawala catalogued this image in 1936, he bracketed it with others from the Kuṣāna period.[173] Yet the piece is not unlike the finest Kaushambi or Chandraketugarh ones of the first century BC – first century AD that we now have available to us. Besides, the use of such a fine mould, the specific type of jewellery and costume were more popular in immediately pre-Kuṣāna North India. Even the iconographic convention of standing over another figure found its earliest depiction in the same period, as for instance in the Gudimallam Linga or the numerous pot-bellied *yakṣa* like atlantes that abound on contemporary Buddhist structures.

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[171] Kala 1980, fig. 77

[172] A further discussion on the iconographic importance of such pieces can be found in Chapter 4.

[173] Agrawala, VS: 1936 (reprinted 1984): pp. 33-34, fig. 49.

As mentioned earlier, male figures whose martial features are highlighted are of several types, and amongst them, those that **carry a bow and arrows** are frequent. [*Fig. 3.103*] [174]This feature has the obvious and all too tempting opportunity for scholarship to attribute to these figures the iconography of *Kāma*, the Indian god of love.[175] The attribution of *Rāma* is also tempting, as both carry a bow. Rarely figures carry a spear, and in that case, as with the ones who are seen with a peacock, scholars have speculated as to whether they may be the earliest representations of *Skanda-Kārtikeya* [*Fig. 3.104*]. This sort of speculation is not unwarranted. After all, all scholars unanimously trace the period of the greatest phase in the development of Indian iconography to at least the late first – second century AD. We are merely suggesting, that many of the advances that were made in that period may have been initiated slightly earlier, in the first century BC, and in a medium that has been largely ignored for such studies heretofore.

Similarly, another plaque can be assumed to show a moment from a **mythological / Epic narrative**. [*Fig 3.105, 3.106*] This extraordinarily fine and moving plaque from Kaushambi exhibits some of the finest skills of the Early-Historic artist. A giant with a gnarled and yet happy face carries away a lithe and helpless woman. His raised left leg expressing the heaviness of his gait serves to remind us of his corpulence. Interestingly, the figure being carried away seems to be strewing her ornaments behind her, the fallen bracelets and necklaces lying scattered on the floor between the giant's legs. This is a moment that is often recounted in the Rāmāyana , when *Rāvana* carried *Sitā* away to Lanka. The possibility of representations of Rāmāyana scenes is not at all unreasonable. It is in keeping within the portrayals of other epic heroes who were establishing their characters' iconography in plastic, theatrical and cultic expositions.[176] At the same time, scenes of abduction at the hands of giants or composite humanoids was also not unknown. Given that epic anti-heroes like *Rāvana* are themselves closely related to the world of *yakṣas* (*Rāvana* is said to be the brother of

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[174] Another identical figure, likely to be from the same mould is also in the collection of the Mathura Museum, No. 35.2557.

[175] Agrawala, VS: 1936 (reprinted 1984).

[176] see chapter 4.

Kubera, the king of the *Yakṣas*), in seeking to identify this figure, we find ourselves confronted with a convincingly entangled web of mythology, legend and historical process. The form that the epics have come to take now, are known to be influenced by several folk-epics, in which case it is likely that this is a portrayal of a version of a proto-narrative for Sītā's abduction.

Some other plaques however, can unfortunately not elicit any discussion on their iconography as their attributes are not known to the subsequent Indian tradition. Take for instance, plaques which show **figures with a basket**, or others who stand in deliberate and considered postures, or show some unrecognisable gesture. In the case of the former, a piece from the Yamuna river bed in Agra District, in the collection of the Mathura Govt. Museum, (No. 28-1731) is fashioned into an almost three dimensional terracotta figure who stands on his own feet, carrying a basket filled with what might be blossoms, or some other ritual paraphernalia. [*Fig. 3.107*] This may be the depiction of a devotee.[177] Yet, while speculation on the nature of cultic affiliation of such pieces can never be satisfactorily settled, the imagery is tempered by the same underlying motivations and systems that are seen in subsequent Indian art. This may be seen in the representations of a hierarchy between figures (suppressed / trampled figures vs. stiff, upright / pleasant deities or diminutive attendants vs. tall deities), the tools used by the artist to enhance their status (parasols, wings, *cauris*, attendants, shrines) and several other such ploys which gave to the artist and his audience both an iconographic vocabulary and a system of semantics that is followed to date.

An unusual figure from Deegh Darwaza in the collection of the Mathura Museum, No. 54.3791, shows a highly **stylised nude male**. [*Fig. 3.108*] The piece is in keeping with the general style of the slightly earlier (second century BC) tradition where grey terracotta figures were made using a mould for the face while the rest of the body remains modelled by hand. Two features immediately stand out in the piece, they are quite deliberately meant to - the figure's nudity and his excessively broad shoulders, both diagnostic features of Jain figures. Another

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[177] This would be in keeping with what we have learnt from recent studies on the patronage of early imagery, aspects of which are discussed along with the possible motivations for the formation of Indian iconography in Chapter 4.

weathered and fragmentary plaque, from nearby Ayodhya, has also been called a Jain tīrthankara by BB Lal.[178] He has dated the piece to the third century BC. The figure has elongated earlobes, appears to be clean-shaven, devoid of any ornaments, and although broken below the waist, his arms might have fallen straight by his side, in the *kāyotsarga* pose. However, both the date and Jain affiliation of this figure are questionable.[179]

Male figures may also, at times, be **associated with animals**, particularly a ram, goat or gazelle. [*Figs. 3.110, 3.109*] [180]Both pieces are in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras and although they are from Rajghat, similar pieces from Taxila and Sugh have already been discussed in previously. A headless male figure holds a lead in his right hand that is attached to a collar worn by a goat or ram. With his other hand he holds one of the animal's horns. He wears a tailored coat that is left open to expose his body, which is nude but for his girdle and beaded necklace. This style of necklace is often represented at Bharhut and identical beads made of gold survive in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art [*Fig. 3.300a*]. Moti Chandra has called the figure a "hunter", while more recent scholarship on the comparable piece from Sugh has speculated whether the piece may represent an early manifestation of Shiva.[181] Variations on this theme are common, as seen in a piece from Ahichhatra, in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (No. 2510) where a figure holds on to a lead tied to a deer. [*Fig. 3.111*]

Some other miscellaneous male figures help us form a more complete picture of the extent of stylistic variation in the region. Compositionally similar, though technically different, are a group of **three-dimensional figures**. These can be made either using moulds (in what is called the 'double moulding' method), by hand, or a combination of the two. Terracotta figures

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[178] BB Lal and SK Srivastava, :1981: pp. 329 – 331, pl. CXXIV.

[179] Lal, (*ibid.*) says the piece belongs to the fourth to third centuries BC, which would be a particularly early date to see an entirely moulded plaque. Since it is broken below the waist we cannot be sure whether the figure was actually nude or did not hold any attribute in his hands, both crucial determinants for a Jain ascription.

[180] Published previously by Moti Chandra: 1971: fig. 60, p.13 and by VS Agrawala: 1941, p. 10, Pl. II, fig. 5.

moulded in the round were known to the Subcontinent for a long time before the Early Historic period. Some of the antecedent traditions continued unchanged, while other pieces, like the ones discussed below, express the stylistic predilections of their age. Two figures in the Mathura Govt. Museum are interesting for the costume that they wear. [*Fig. 3.112*] (No. 71.12) a bearded man seated in what is usually, and perhaps erroneously, called the 'European' pose, wears a shawl around one shoulder, and sits with what may conceivably be a plate of food, in his lap. The piece is significant art historically. The sculpture stands on three legs, the figure's own legs form the front two, and a small stump at the back completes the tripod. Several pieces were excavated from Sonkh, which showed a similar treatment. The style is also known to have been exceedingly popular at Buxar in Middle-Gangetic Valley in the 'Mauryan' period. The figure itself is modelled, but the face appears to have been initially pulled from a mould and subsequently embellished by hand. Again, a technique common in the second century BC. The shape of the double outlined, lenticular eyes too, is reminiscent of other second century BC figurines, as seen in [*Fig 3.54, 3.58*]. But perhaps most interesting of all, are the figure's beard, schematised curly hair and coat, which immediately betray Western Classical influences that would probably have come to the Upper-Gangetic Valley via the Northwest.

No. 35.2556, [*Fig. 3.113 a and b*] from the same region, also shows a figure wearing a coat, with a shawl draped over both his shoulders.[182] In keeping with the style of these coats, it has bunched up sleeves. Below it, he wears a *dhoti* over which a girdle is fastened. The figure wears a short necklace with a long central bead. His hands are positioned over the girdle, and the figure has an upright stance. His facial features are more commonly seen in late second – first century BC pieces, as is the lateral projection of his headdress. The figure has long subtended earlobes.

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[181] Records of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford on their piece from Sugh (No. 1999.27) vs. M. Chandra: 1971.

[182] The piece was previously published by VS Agrawala: 1936 (reprint 1984): figs. 24-25, p. 28, where he dated it to the pre-Sunga period.

A weathered head in the collection of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay from Kaushambi (No. 81.4/3) must originally have been part of a large terracotta sculpture. [*Fig 3.114 a, b and c*] It is entirely modelled, in a technique and scale not known in any other terracotta image from the Early Historic Period. The Museum's records date the piece to the third century AD, which is perhaps, too late a date for this piece. Indeed, the technique of making large modelled sculpture was more popular in the late Kuṣāna and Gupta periods, but the style of this piece is undoubtedly from the first century AD. His highly decorated turban with its large central projection, is commonly seen in what is called the 'Śunga – Sātvāhana' period stone reliefs. The facial features too, with its rounded cheeks, small chin, and gentle almond shaped eyes, are more likely to belong to the same tradition that sculpted the great reliefs of Sanchi than the intermediate art of the Late Kuṣāna – Early Gupta style. In the light of this earlier dating, this piece is one of the first expressions of a large-scale terracotta image in the round, a precursor to a technique that reached perhaps its apogee in the Gupta period.

The last category of solitary male figures are the representations of **pot-bellied dwarves** with wrinkled and furrowed expressions. As discussed in the following chapter on iconography, several different types of *Yakṣas* were known in the period, and although the class of giant *Yakṣas* abound in literary and sculptural depictions, the grimacing, diminutive ones have received little scholarly attention. This type is undoubtedly more popular in Bengal, however, as mentioned earlier, Kaushambi was an equally vibrant centre for terracotta production at the time, and shows as much variety and skill in the execution of its pieces. The only significant difference between the two lies in the generally greater decorativeness and greater frequency of finely executed pieces in Bengal. [*Fig 3.115, 3.116*] Often the dwarf *Yakṣas* wear a diadem of flowers, have bulging round eyes, upward pointed ears, broad stubby noses and as mentioned earlier, furrowed brows and contorted expressions. At times they display their fangs prominently when they pull at the edges of their mouths with their index fingers. They invariably have large pot-bellies, and are scantily clad in just a loin cloth, though it is common to see them nude, displaying their disproportionately large genitalia. The iconography is also

popular in a group of double-moulded hollow plaques (perhaps rattles), where the squatting figure commonly holds a bird in his lap. [*Fig. 3.117*][183]

MITHUNA SCENES

VS Agrawala conducted the first detailed study of the *mithuna* iconography in the terracotta art of this region.[184] He classified all scenes of 'couples' into two categories: *Mithuna* and *Dampati*, [185] an order that is popular to date with many art-historians. As per this distinction, when the man is on the proper right of the woman the piece is to be taken as a *dampati*, or 'married couple', and in pieces where the position is reversed it is merely a *mithuna*. Agrawala's classification however, needs re-examination. The idea that in representations of a married couple, the man stands on the right sounds like it has been conditioned largely by later Indian iconographic conventions of images of *Umā-maheśvara* or *Kalayāna sundaramūrti*, where this is undoubtedly true. However, there seems to be no reason to believe that a similar order can be imposed on Early-Historic terracotta. There are many pieces where the male figure may be on the left or right and neither he nor the lady beside him possess any quality that would distinguish their marital status. In fact there are still other pieces which show a more 'bacchanalian' scene with a lady between two men, or several figures together. The classification of pieces into *mithuna* (a loving couple) and *maithuna* (a loving couple engaged sexually) in this regard is therefore one that remains perfectly valid, but to go as far as naming a separate category *dampati*, is untenable. Besides, Agrawala's monograph on the subject is very confusing, as after having made this differentiation between the two types, many of the plaques that he illustrates as *dampati* actually show the male on the left side! (This might of course be a case of images reversed in the printing.)

At any rate, Agrawala's study has shown the enormous variety and popularity that this type of plaque had at Ahichhatra, and the reader is directed to his in-depth study for illustrations of

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[183] A similar piece from Kaushambi is in the collection of the Allahabad Municipal Museum, No. K 2564.

[184] Agrawala, VS: 1948.

[185] V S Agrawala : 1947 -48 (Reprinted 1984): p 5.

those plaques.[186] I have concentrated here, on the pieces from other sites in the Upper-Gangetic Valley, some of which duplicate the types encountered at Ahichhatra. The greatest variety is once again encountered at Kaushambi.

The most common type of plaque, met across the region, at Ahichhatra, Mathura, Kannauj, or virtually any other site, shows a male and female figure standing next to each other. The equal importance given to both figures suggests their uniform status. Either of the partners may frequently be seen to hold on to the girdle of the other. [*Figs. 3.118, 3.119,*[187] *3.120 and 3.131*] The figures are rigid and frontal, are dressed in all the usual accoutrements and costume of men in *dhotis* and coats with their chests bare and heavily jewelled ladies. Some differentiation in this broad typology may be created on account of the minor variations in the costumes of the figures. Elaborate head-dresses are, particularly in the case of the females, to be expected in all the pieces, which is perfectly in keeping with the period on the whole. Interestingly however, at times, the lady may sport the trend of wearing *āyudhas* in her hair. If the possession of these weapons is indicative of a 'goddess', we will have to extend that analogy to *mithunas* as well.[188] These frontal type of *mithunas* are common to the Northwest and Indo-Gangetic Divide as well.

Compositions with a greater amount of movement can sometimes show the male figure with an arm around his partner [*Fig. 3.122*], the figures may be embracing [*Fig. 3.123*], or the male may gently be touching his partners chin or lips [*Fig. 3.124*]. A similar compositional strategy is seen in [*Fig. 3.125*] from the 'Late Mitra' levels at Sonkh, that is the middle to second half of the first century BC.

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[186] *Op. cit.*

[187] A similar figure from Jhusi, not illustrated here, is in the collection of the Municipal Museum, Allahabad, No. 4606.

[188] Some scholars have interpreted what they saw as the absence of the 'goddess with weapons' in *mithuna* scenes as one of her distinguishing characteristics. This view is baseless, as many *mithuna* plaques have been found where the ladies sport these weapons. These views are elaborated on in the following chapter.

Two fine plaques from Kaushambi deserve special mention in this respect. Fig. 3.126 in the Allahabad Museum (No. 5196) shows an embracing couple facing each other, and for the first time, we see an attempt on the part of the sculptor to render the figures in profile rather than the almost invariable preference for frontal images that we have so far encountered. This idea is carried forward in a plaque in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 2/22126) [*Fig. 3.127*] where the woman is shown looking back over her shoulder at the male figure who is approaching her. Showing the twisted form of the woman as she steps down from a pedestal highlights the idea of movement. One of her arms is around her partner's neck, the other touching his thigh. Two interesting features of this plaque should be noted: The representation of a rear view of the female and the presence of a palm print behind the plaque. The former is a compositional strategy seldom encountered in Early-Historic art.[189] The palm print is of the maker of the plaque, who while pressing the clay into the mould perhaps forgot to smoothen the surface, leaving us his signature, as it were, at the back. The palm is small, and even if we account for the natural shrinking that red clay is most susceptible to during firing, this could only be the palm of a child or a woman who was working in a guild or workshop that produced such plaques.

One of the more popular plaques at Kaushambi, impressions of which are to be found in several collections[190], shows a male and female figure seated together on a chair, against a background of flowers. [*Fig. 3.128*] The embracing figures have a footstool before them. The woman sits on her partner's lap with one arm around his shoulder and the other touching her earring while he reaches for her girdle. All the plaques have either one or two holes on top that would have been used to suspend them.

As noted in other contexts, it is not unusual to see ladies in an attitude of *'śrngāra'*. Considering we have no definite proof that different "*rasas*" were being consciously expressed

[189] There are a few reliefs of group scenes at the Buddhist Stupas of Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati where the backs of figures may be shown, and there are a few terracotta examples from Chandraketugarh, but on the whole, the treatment is rare.

[190] See for instance: Kala, SC: 1980: fig. 82, p. 35, from the Allahabad Museum; Poster, AG: 1986: fig.7 from the National Museum, Delhi; M. Chandra: 1971: p. 11, fig. 54 from the Bharat Kala Bhavan,

in art, we must use the word *'śrngāra'* with reservation. At the same time, there can be no doubt that the various sculptural / compositional formulae that were used to express the attitude of *śrngāra* in later Indian art, find their first expression here. It is also likely that the first major codification of the eight *rasas* in the *Nātya Śāstra* of Bharata took place in the Early-Historic Period. In addition to plaques of single ladies with gestures of looking into mirrors, talking to pet birds, adjusting their hairdos and earrings, we can also find *mithuna* depictions that express these sentiments. In [*Fig. 3.129*] in the collection of the Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 42.2921) an almost classical Indian posture of *tribhanga* lends to the lady grace and movement. The artist has tried to show her torso twisting, as she looks behind her back to her raised heel. Her hand reaches toward this heel.[191] Not only in terms of iconography then, but also for their artistic styles of composition, idiom and visual symbolism, the Early-Historic terracotta plaques stand as the earliest reference for much of what is the norm in Indian art for over two millennia.

Often *mithunas* can be seen in a context of music and dance, where the female figure is found dancing while a male figure may either follow her or carry an instrument. [*Fig. 3.130*] At times a couple can be seen seated together enjoying a performance. [Fig. 3.131] Since the size of the plaques remains as small as the ones with single figures, the scale of representation shrinks considerably in order to accommodate lots of figures in the same area. It is difficult to determine whether one should label such scenes as 'secular' narratives or associate them with some religious ritual. *Mithunas* can also be seen with attendants, as, for example, two Kaushambi plaques beautifully illustrate. In [*Fig. 3.132*] in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (No. 5286) a lady in a graceful *tribhanga* pose stands with a bare torso, clad only in a lower garment made of beads and medallions. The sculptor has taken care to show how tactile her body is by almost breaking the confines of his shallow two-dimensional relief, and investing the female figure with movement, a gentle protuberance of the stomach, the distension of her girdle which seems almost to be slipping off her proper right hip. Her partner

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Banaras; there is another piece in the Mathura Museum, No. 1702, among others. For a more securely dated piece, from the excavations at Kaushambi, see GR Sharma:1969: Pl. XXIV-A.

is completely hidden from view as he stands behind her, only his head peeping over her shoulder indicates his important role in the composition. A third figure, a tall male, stands in profile in a fine gossamer *dhoti* to their proper right. A diminutive attendant in a peaked cap and holding a mirror stands on the opposite side of the plaque. This particular style of attendant figure is worthy of an independent scholarly investigation. One can tell the figure is usually female, and despite her diminutive size, is shown fully developed. She / he often wears a peaked (Phrygian) cap, and rarely, the cap can end with the head of a cockerel, which was a style known in the Scythian communities in the Northwest.

A more elaborate composition can be seen in another plaque showing a *mithuna* seated in a chair. [*Fig. 3.133*] A chair is placed in the bottom left corner of the plaque, in what appears to be a verandah or terraced forecourt. The entire composition is set between two pillars, indicating an architectural context for the scene. An attendant is seated before the *mithuna* couple, and another woman wearing bracelets peeps over the wall just above the figures. The building behind the figures has an upper storey with an arched doorway and two peacocks are seated upon the railing of the balcony. It appears that the upper storey would have been under a barrel vaulted roof, not uncommonly represented in the reliefs of Sanchi and the other early stupas.[192]

Maithuna depictions however, are relatively uncommon in the region, and when they are found they are usually heavily weathered and show that they were not made with the same felicitousness as the Eastern Indian ones were.[193] A rare exception is a fragment from Jhusi in the collection of the Allahabad Museum, No. 5281. [*Fig. 3.134*] Although only the male figure is visible, we can tell that the plaque would have depicted a *maithuna* on account of the leg of

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[191] In subsequent Indian art, this would have been a gesture associated with pulling a thorn out of her heel, which is in itself a loaded symbol – commonly associated with *śrngāra*, the woman's tenderness, grace, and plea for sympathy.

[192] A *mithuna* in an architectural frame is also known from level 27 ('Mitra' – mid first century BC) at Sonkh. The couple stands below a *Caitya* arch, supported by seven wooden rafters. The figures in a sort of three-quarter profile stand facing each other, holding hands.
Härtel: 1993: p. 103, 108, fig.61.

[193] A few examples from Kaushambi may be seen in Kala, SC: 1950, pl. XVII A, B and C; and in Kala, SC: 1980, figs. 105, 108, p 41.

the female with an anklet bent around him. The plaque can also be compared with *maithuna* pieces from Chandraketugarh and Tamluk. The plaque is finely modelled and the artist has taken care to show the looseness of the man's sash which has lifted up to his stomach, the bend in his back creating a fold in his flesh which is sharply delineated across his torso. The background of the piece bears small floral motifs. A hole in the plaque indicates that even *maithuna* scenes were probably suspended against a wall.

TOY CARTS, NARRATIVE AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS PIECES:

Only the occasional narrative scene is known from the sites in the Divide[194], and none have been reported from the Northwest so far. However, the moment we enter the ambit of the sites along the length of the Ganga Valley, an altogether different picture arises. Plaques are more varied, decorative and numerous. Those with many different characters, human and animal, engaged in some sort of exchange, show that they might be telling a story. That their representation is, once again, consistent over many sites, suggests that these plaques may well be depicting some commonly known narratives, whether religious or secular. Some of the more popular scenes are discussed below.

Male figures are usually seen in scenes where they display their strength. Often this takes the form of showing the figure as a charioteer. *Fig. 3.135* shows a figure (warrior?) riding a chariot pulled by four bulls. The shape of the chariot with its upturned end is similar to several other terracotta examples and is also found in the reliefs of Sanchi and other Buddhist sites. Sometimes, the chariot can be pulled by horses, and in those cases scholars have speculated as to whether it might be an early expression of the god Sūrya. The example illustrated here, from the Allahabad Museum (No. 5075), has the additional feature of showing the figure under a parasol, which is a symbol reserved either for royalty or to indicate a divine status.

A very unusual plaque from Mathura [*Fig. 3.136*] (Mathura Govt. Museum, No. 39.2853) of the same genre, shows a man riding a cart pulled by what appear to be goats. (Even if one

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[194] Such as the piece from Kurukshetra discussed earlier.

allowed for artistic licence, the shape of the horns, and particularly the tails of the animals cannot belong to bulls.) The plain cart is seen leaving a building which has a *torana* shaped gateway with two architraves supported by pillars and a finial in the top centre. Equally interesting is the rider's helmet, which is undoubtedly inspired by the contemporary Indo-Greeks who were making inroads into Mathura at this time.

A popularly found narrative scene shows two to three figures seated on an elephant, where the man in front is usually a mahout carrying an *ankusha*, and the latter two may be seen either playing a bow shaped harp or dropping coins behind them. The plaque has been identified as the story of the elopement of Udayana and Vāsavdattā[195], which in all likelihood would have been part of the folklore of the area in the period.[196] According to the story the valiant king Udayana of Kaushambi was once taken captive by the neighbouring kingdom of Ujjaini. Here, he was entrusted with teaching the princess Vāsavdattā music. The pre-ordained romance between them grew under the auspices of the music lessons and resulted ultimately, in their elopement on cow-elephant Bhadrāvatī. It is also recorded that they showered coins behind them as they escaped.

Minor variations exist in different plaques with this scene. A complete plaque in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (No. 5008) shows two figures seated in front of the elephant, a man carrying a bow harp and a woman turning to look back at him, while she holds on to one of her earrings. The male figure at the back is dropping coins behind him which are being collected of the ground by two crouching figures. The background of the plaque is interspersed with rosettes, the whole piece shaped like a rough medallion, with a suspension hole in the centre. Identical pieces, perhaps made from the same mould can be seen in the collections of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 4405) [*Fig. 3.137*], the Gurukul Jhajjar, National

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[195] The attribution was first suggested perhaps by Rai Krishnadasa, 1945: pp. 82-90, pl. 1-2, see also Kala: 1980, pp. 58-59. See a précis of the narrative in Vettam Mani: 1996 (reprint): pp. 801 – 03.

[196] As Kala has said, four different textual versions of the story of Udayana are known, all of them seem to draw on the same common pool of folk narratives surrounding this local hero, *ibid.* Sharma, the excavator of Kaushambi, has listed several other literary references for Udayana narratives (see above). Udayana was apparently a ruler of Kaushambi itself, and it is therefore possible that stories of his narrative were given a plastic form there.

Museum Delhi, etc. Another piece in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 2347) [*Fig. 3.138*] shows the same scene in a rectangular plaque with two suspension holes, where the figures are riding an elephant set between two palm trees. The elephant saddle is made of a furry animal skin on which the figures ride. A similar skin is found on another plaque from Kaushambi in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (No. 5299). In these latter two plaques three important parts of the narrative that were seen in the others are missing: The man at the back is no longer showering coins behind him, the elephant is in these cases a bull with tusks and not a cow, and the rider is not carrying a bow harp. Without these three important factors, it is difficult to identify the latter two plaques with the Udayana narrative. Scenes of two or three figures riding an elephant are common in not just the terracotta from this region but also from Bengal, and can even be found in other media, take for example the two roughly contemporary silver roundels in the collection of the British Museum[197]. At times the figures can be under a royal *chhatra*, be attended by a *cauri* bearer or a figure carrying either a standard or a reliquary. In the latter case, the same composition perhaps articulates a different iconography. Czuma has suggested that it probably shows the division of the Buddha's relics.[198]

But narrative plaques need not depict a scene that can be associated with any religious moment or even folk epic. (Or perhaps, we cannot read such an interpretation into these pieces anymore.) A piece excavated from Rajghat shows an elephant riding a chariot pulled by four others. It is currently housed in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 4827), where most of the other pieces from the Rajghat excavations lie. VS Agrawala interpreted it as a representation of the festivities that accompanied an ancient Indian fair.[199] Four different scenes can be seen on this plaque - a cockfight, two wrestling men, a bullfight and the elephant chariot. Agrawala points out how many of these festivities have been listed in ancient

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[197] British Museum OA 1937.3-19.5 and 1937.3-19.6, both purchased together in Rawalpindi in 1922, see Errington and Cribb: 1992: pp. 160-61.

[198] Czuma, S.: 1985: pp. 155.

[199] Agrawala, VS: 1953: pp. 82-85, pl. XIV.

texts.[200] Another relief in the same museum (No.23162), [*Fig. 3.139*] shows only the lower part of the scene, i.e. an elephant riding a chariot pulled by two others. Whether these festivities were associated with some cult or were secular is difficult to assess. The importance of ritual festivities in the period has been discussed in the following chapter.

What might be a part of such festivals, is a scene that shows a man pulling a cart with an elephant upon it while a woman carrying a basket or plate looks on. [*Fig. 3.140*] A part of the same scene, made from another impression from a very similar mould is preserved in *Fig. 3.141*. The elephant has a lead wound around his trunk which the man pulls on. Several versions of this plaque survive. In the Gangetic valley the type is (so far) only known from Kaushambi. Interestingly, large, life-like modelled elephants also feature in the Udayana narrative. In order to capture Udayana, King Chandamahāsena of Ujjaini (Vāsavdattā's father) had a model made of his own elephant, Nadāgirī. Like a Trojan horse, the elephant was filled with Ujjain's soldiers and carefully placed near Udayana's territory. Perceiving it as the advance of the rival king Chandamahāsena, Udayana decided to capture what he thought was the royal elephant. Easily mistaken in the fading evening light, he tried to lure the model elephant by playing music to it on his fabled lute. But the elephant kept retreating into the forest and soon, when Udayana was alone, the soldiers jumped out and surrounded him. The captured Udayana was then compelled to teach Vāsavdattā music at the Ujjaini court.[201]

The ideas of valour and supernatural strength in men are brought out in [*Fig. 3.142, 3.143*] where a man fights a winged lion. All three pieces are from Kaushambi. The plaque shows a furious winged lion pouncing on a cowering elephant from the proper top right of the plaque. The petrified elephant rendered incontinent raises his forelegs before a brave warrior. The man is seen grasping another winged lion by the neck while he reaches to strike him with his other hand. His fine diaphanous costume and jewels indicate that he might be a prince.

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[200] *Ibid.* Buddhist texts like the Dighanikaya, interestingly, prohibit these festivities for monks. Perhaps that is why we see them represented not on the Buddhist stupas but on the terracotta arts of the other prevalent cults.

[201] Vettam Mani: 1996 (reprint): p. 802.

Clearly, this scene is about a mythical story. More complete versions of this plaque have been found in Bengal.

In another, perhaps related scene, a figure is seen tearing open the mouth of a lion. The piece is from Shahabad, Hardoi District, UP, and is in the collection of Dr. Jagdish Gupta in Allahabad. [*Fig. 3.144a and 3.144b*] It is shaped like a circular medallion, where two black clay moulded plaques have been joined back to back. The scene may represent the child Bharata counting the teeth of a lion cub, a scene in Kālidāsa's play, *Abhijñānam Śakuntalam*. While Kālidāsa himself might have lived later, it is known that he often dipped into the storehouse of available myth and history to write his plays. The plaque is interesting on two counts, its double moulding, and the style of depiction. The modelling of the figure on obverse side shows the boy with a certain fleshiness, he is scantily clad, even the lion is stylised to a degree not commonly encountered in Early Historic art. The reverse comprises a geometric motif with four leaves that meet in the centre, they alternate with *triratna* symbols.

In *Fig. 3.105 / 3.106* we saw a corpulent giant, perhaps a *yakṣa* or *Rāvana* carry away a female figure. Although it is likely that that scene depicted *Rāvana*, we cannot be absolutely sure, as themes of abduction are common in Ancient art.[202] Certain other scenes (particularly the piece from Mathura) had also shown a deity either suppressing another figure or in some cases, a figure riding a dwarf pot-bellied *yakṣa*. In keeping with that pattern, is another group usually found in the Mathura region, where a figure with large earrings carrying a bow harp sits on the shoulders of a pot bellied atlas. [*Fig. 3.145*] The *yakṣa* has thickly set features with large bulging eyes. In his study of Mathura Terracottas, Agrawala had noted how this *yakṣa* figure is akin to the atlantes on the Mathura railing pillars of the 'Śunga' period.[203] He also mentions how this class of dwarf *yakṣas* is mentioned as early as the Atharvaveda [VIII.6],

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[202] See Kala: 1980: p. 57, where he refers to a broadly contemporary stone relief from Nasik, Rāni Kā Nur cave in Orissa and Amaravati. In the case of 'abduction' scenes in the art of Gandhara, it has at times been suggested that the *yakṣa* in question may be a local version of the cult of *Ghatotkachha*, who was absorbed at some point in his history into the Mahābhārata Epic.

[203] Agrawala, VS: 1936: p. 32.

and it is likely that that tradition continued into the terracotta art of the Early-Historic period.[204],[205]

Representations of what have been called 'toy carts' are very common, and even in comparison with Eastern Indian ones, the Kaushambi pieces have perhaps the greatest variety.[206] These carts may be divided, in terms of their shape, into three types.[207]

1. A hollow trough, where one, three, or all of the outer four walls are composed of decorated moulded plaques. These pieces usually have space for an axle on the underside, on either side of which terracotta wheels would have been attached. Several terracotta wheels that would have belonged to these carts have been found, and reconstructed pieces are to be seen in most collections. At times they may carry a socket in the front of the carts as well, to which, probably a terracotta draught animal like a bull, horse or elephant would have been attached. Examples of these animals also survive. At the same time, the cart may have been pushed along with the help of a stick that was fitted into the socket, as seen in some representations in Bengal, in which case, no animals would have been used. Fragmentary pieces, that would have comprised one of the walls of the cart and would have been attached to three others also survive. It is more common to find the frontal and more decorated moulded sides rather than any of the other walls.
2. Also a hollow trough, but with both the inside and exterior moulded. These pieces are shallow, and frequently show moulded figures seated in the cart engaged in various activities. They are otherwise similar to the above type.
3. A three-dimensional 'tricycle' type. Usually shaped as an animal, *makara* or leogryph, these may have comprised the front or back of a 'cart and draught animal' pair. Rarely, they can be shaped as a human figure carried by atlantes. In all the above types it is not essential that there was always a toy draught animal that pulled these carts forward.

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[204] *Ibid.*

[205] An identical piece is in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, No. 73.99.4, and further fragments are available in the Mathura Museum, such as No. 2213.

[206] For examples of excavated ones with notes on their stratigraphy, see GR Sharma: 1969: Pls. XXVIII a – d, XLII.

Representations from Bengal in private collections have shown that at times a short rod could be inserted into the socket in front and then could be pushed along by children. The evidence for this has been described in the section on Lower-Gangetic Valley terracotta.

Examples of the first group are the most common. The front wall usually carries, (a.) four plumed caparisoned horses [*Fig. 3.146, 3.147*], or, (b.) a pair of yoked bulls against a background of rosettes [*Fig. 3.148, 3.149*]. At times, a row of riders are moulded on to the top of the front wall. It is likely that in the other cases, miniature three-dimensional riders of various media would have been placed in the carts. The treatment of the plaques is exactly like the other Early-Historic pieces discussed so far. The shape of the chariot itself can be of two types: Where the side walls are scooped and raised at the rear to a point, or more commonly, where the tops of the side walls are convex. The rear wall is usually shorter than the others, as the riders would have mounted the cart from there. The side and rear walls tend not to carry figural representations, whether animal or human. They are usually patterned with floral motifs.

Perhaps the more interesting of the toy carts are the second group. These usually take on a rectangular or broadly lozenge shape, can have outward flaring side walls, and bear figures on the interior of the carts. One of the most famous pieces of Early-Historic terracotta, is one such piece from the environs of Kaushambi (extending to neighbouring sites like Bhita). Obviously popular, pieces probably pulled from the same mould, are in various collections[208]. [*Figs. 3.150 a and b, 3.151 a and b*] Six figures sit inside the cart with a woman sandwiched between two men on either side. The artist has used a bird's eye view for these figures, a point of perspective seldom used in early Indian art. Two of the figures, a man and woman are in conversation (or perhaps engaged in a kiss), the former reaching toward the latter who is looking back at him over her shoulder. On the opposite side, a man reaches for the necklace of the woman next to him, while the figure sitting on her other side pulls her by her hair

[207] A similar typology is available in Poster: 1986: p109; see also Margabandhu, C.: 1983: pp. 163 – 169.

[208] Such as the Mathura Museum, No. 5469, State Museum Lucknow, No. 4284, two pieces in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras, Nos. 3482, 3491, Indian Museum Calcutta, No. N52 and of course at Allahabad, 2589 and 4870.

towards him. They sit against a padded and cushioned interior wall. Between them are two large discs. One of them is clearly a platter of food, with some of the things shaped like *chapātīs* and fresh vegetables. The other seems to be a drum or covered basket. The piece has often been called a 'picnic cart' or a *goṣti-yānam*, a cart bound for pleasurable or cultural gatherings.[209] Fairs and festivals played an important part in the daily life of Ancient India, and the evidence collected from several textual sources indicates that urban and rural citizens often gathered for such occasions. The festivals were both religious and secular. Whether this piece shows the figures bound for a religious meeting or not, is not only impossible to determine, it is also not that important. What is worth noting however, is the important place this piece commands in Indian art history, as an intimate glimpse into a people's way of living and the artistic innovation in both technique and visualisation.

A cart in the collection of the Mathura Museum, No. 54.3799, excavated from Katra Keshav Deo (Mathura Dist.) shows a man lying down. [*Fig. 3.152*] His smiling face peeping out from under a sunshade. The outward flaring walls bear two panels of flowers surrounded by leaves on each side. The ground of the cart is littered with a few more flowers. Interestingly, and inexplicably, two palm prints are visible at the far end of the cart. Perhaps, they belong to the atlantes who would have carried it[210]. On the other hand, palm prints are a not unusual apotropaic device with a long history in the Subcontinent, and several Early-Historic artefacts carry them.[211]

Of the same group, is a surface find from Kaushambi in the collection of the Gurukul Jhajjar. [*Fig. 3.153 a and b*] Three figures are seated in a cart with two round-bottomed *ghatas* or terracotta pots between them. The outstretched leg of one of the passengers, their easy, reclining postures and their pots of food and water make a candidly observed portrait of

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[209] See Kala: 1980: p. 76; M. Chandra: 1971: p. 11.

[210] A similar idea in another plaque, in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras, No. 22278, also shows the palm prints, the figure however is not lying down but leaning against a side wall.

[211] See for instance, Coomaraswamy: 1956: pl. XXV, fig. 65; pl. XXXII, fig.87.

figures on a long journey. The idea that the cart is made of wood is conveyed by the beams that run across its floor and side walls.

The tricycles of type 3, are usually partly moulded and partly modelled. They are three-dimensional and show either humans or animals. The animals are usually makaras [*Fig. 3.154*] or other composite animals. At times, they can be part human and part animal or bird. The human figures, as mentioned earlier may be supported by pot bellied atlantes. Often the male figures hold their hands in *añjali* mudra. In a few pieces the men are seated on rams or elephants. The Allahabad Museum's cart No. 5080 shows an upward facing composite male figure with wings. [*Fig. 3.155*] Below his torso, a long plume of peacock feathers forms the length of the tricycle. His hands are clasped together in *añjali*. Winged figures, as Kala has pointed out are common in the Early-Historic period;[212] terracotta ones have already been discussed, and versions in stone are referred to. Further, he has associated this piece with the trend for representing *Kinnaras*. Poster however, while discussing a similar piece from the Neotia collection, has tried to suggest that it might be *Kārtikeya*, on account of the association with a peacock.[213] This is an interpretation that has already been noted with regard to other plaques.

The Upper Ganga Valley is a region with a large number of sites, that offer an archaeologist or art historian an almost unwieldy quantity of Early-Historic moulded terracotta. These sites had been inhabited for a long duration before they selected the style of sculpture addressed here. This is particularly well illustrated in the case of Kaushambi, Sonkh and Hastinapur. The urban, nature of these sites, and their long histories are factors that must constantly be borne in mind when we try and appreciate the nature of the culture that engendered such prolific imagery.

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[212] Kala: 1980: p. 73.

[213] Poster: 1986: p. 109.

As far as the imagery itself is concerned, not only is it widespread and plentiful, it is consistent. Patterns of a visual language are followed across all the sites. At the same time, sites seem to have their own predilections. For instance, of the wide variety of pieces that have been revealed at Kaushambi, certain types are not to be found at any other site in the Subcontinent. The style of the northern part of the Upper-Gangetic Valley (Mathura and Ahichhatra), shows some affinities with material from sites like Sugh and Agroha on the one side, and Kaushambi on the other. Ayodhya seems to hold on to the technique of reduction fired grey ceramic even into the first century BC, by which time most other sites in the Subcontinent used it less frequently. Kannauj and Sankisa frequently show similarities, can sometimes show a greater amount of 'Kuṣāna' influence in their facial types.

On the matter of chronology, once again, like the Indo-Gangetic Divide and the Northwest, the pieces seem to fit within the general dates between the second century BC and the first century AD. Several factors lead us to these dates. Sites such as Kaushambi, Sonkh, Hastinapur and Ahichhatra are all in tandem when it comes to the nature of terracotta assemblages, numismatics, urbanisation, pottery, all of which is quite securely dated between roughly 200 BC – AD 100. The only aspects of their dating that have really been debated are either concerning their proto-Historic dates, or to what extent they might affect our knowledge of the commencement of the Kuṣāna era. Neither of these debates affect us. Once we have accepted the *c.*200BC – 100AD set of dates for the terracotta plaques, several other interesting factors emerge. Take for instance, the relatively early interpenetration of Northwestern features at sites like Mathura. This is hardly surprising when we consider the rapid political changes that this region was subject to in the first centuries BC-AD. This material can also, be compared with the style of imagery in the Indo-Gangetic Divide, which we established in the previous section had also begun to show Śaka-Parthian influences. It also compels us to examine more closely the nature of immediately pre-Kuṣāna art.

It appears that many of the ideas that are presented in a coherent, and eclectic artistic language in the Kuṣāna period, can be traced to the Early-Historic phase. The terracotta plaques from the second century BC to first century AD had already begun to express and fix

iconographies for deities. They had also begun the process of visually expressing 'heroes' (perhaps of popular narratives) and local deities; characters, which might at some point in their careers, have been absorbed into the Indian pantheon.

IV: MIDDLE GANGETIC VALLEY

PATNA, VAISHALI, LAURIYA-NANDANGARH, BASARH, RAJGIR, RAJGHAT, TILAURA-KOT

Densely populated, and with a large number of sites, the Middle-Gangetic Valley presents a picture not unlike the one seen in the previous section on the Upper-Gangetic Valley. Since the region has the same period of habitation, near identical terracotta assemblages, and is very close in its style too, I am going to avoid repeating the ideas that have already been introduced in the above section. Instead, I will concentrate on (1.) the subtle points of stylistic and iconographic variance from Upper-Gangetic Valley material, and (2) discuss some previously unpublished terracotta, and concentrate on sites that have relatively received little attention heretofore.[214]

Patna (25° 37', 85° 10'), ancient Pataliputra, was perhaps, the most important seat of power in Eastern India from the fifth to second centuries BC. It spans about seventeen ancient ruins, two of which, **Bulandibagh** and **Kumrahar**, are the most significant. The site was situated at the confluence of several rivers. The Gandak and Punpun joined the Ganga, and the Son also joined it not far away, giving it an ideal location to carry out trade. The Son has now shifted, and flows about 20 miles away. Four major routes radiated from the city, Southwest to Kaushambi and Ujjain and onward to Barygaza; a Northern route to Nepal, via Vaishali, Shravasti and Tilaura-Kot; the Northwestern trade passed via Mathura to Taxila and Bactria, and toward the Southeast to the major ports of Tamluk and Chandraketugarh. Each of these cities were in themselves major international entrepôt in the Early-Historic period, and this gave Pataliputra an unrivalled cosmopolitan character.

This international character is best attested in Megasthenes's *Indica*. Although the *Indica* does not itself survive, passages from the text have been quoted by Stabo, Arrian and other

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[214] For a more recent general survey of the sites of Bihar see, Chakrabarti, DK., *et al.*:1995: 130 – 146.

Classical writers. These references from his work indicate that Palibothra, as Pataliputra was known to the Greeks, was over 80 stadia (over 9 miles) long and 15 stadia (about 1.3 miles) wide. The city is meant to have had elaborate palaces, pillared halls and gardens.[215]

Reliable textual sources for the city are not limited to Classical sources alone. They are varied and numerous[216] and these egged archaeological explorations at the site from the early 19th century on. The early attempts of Buchanan / Rennel and Cunningham / Beglar did not reveal much, and it was only the 1892 to 1899 excavations by Waddell that revealed the first murmurs of what was to follow. Spooner, under the aegis of the ASI reinitiated digging at the site in 1912. These excavations proved beyond doubt the presence of a large Mauryan palace.

Modern Patna extends over the ancient city, and it has never been possible to excavate the site to the extent that it warrants. In laying the sewers for the modern city in the 1920s, enormous quantities of beads, terracotta figurines and pottery were found. Unsystematically dug up, with no records, these fascinating objects in the Patna Museum offer precious little to reconstruct, with any accuracy, the history of the city. Instead these Early-Historic objects have to be compared and related to what has been discovered in subsequent archaeological excavations. These have been conducted several times, prominent among them are the ones in 1926 –27 by JA Page and M. Ghosh and those from 1951-55 by Altekar and Mishra.[217]

The city, it appears, was settled in the period of Udayin, the grandson and successor of Ajatshatru, who moved the capital of Magadha from Rajgir (Rajgriha) to Pataliputra in the first half of the fifth century BC. However, barring some terracotta figurines, the bulk of the archaeological discoveries at the site largely trace its history as far back as the Mauryan period. The city underwent repeated flooding, as it does to date, and the high water table still

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[215] Megasthenes' historical accuracy has, on several occasions been questioned. For a critical study of his social and political divisions of Indian society, see Thapar, Romila: 1987: pp. 32-35, 46-47.

[216] See for instance, the limited references in A. Ghosh (ed.): 1989: pp. 334 – 336, and the bibliography included therein.

[217] See a discussion on these in A. Ghosh, *ibid.* and Chakrabarti, DK, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-212.

submerges most of the excavations. It was also subject to a devastating fire in the second century BC, following which portions of it were variously resettled until the fifth century AD.

Terracotta imagery at the site has a long and rich history. Objects from here feature in almost every publication on Indian terracotta art. The style of the Early-Historic moulded terracotta seems to become most popular between 150 BC and AD 100. These dates are corroborated not just by virtue of the associated finds of coins similar to those found at Kaushambi, but also from the stratigraphy at Kumrahar, where they were all discovered from Period II. The style and iconography owes in large measure to what has been witnessed in the Mauryan period in the region. These antecedent traditions and their impact have been discussed in the previous chapter.

Buxar (25° 34', 84° 1'), is a prolific site that has received scant archaeological attention.[218] Situated in District Bhojpur, on the Ganga, the river is cutting sharply into the mound. The site has revealed many terracotta images, of both the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods. However habitation at the site can be traced, on account of the presence of NBPW, BRW and Grey ware, to about 600 – 400 BC. It seems the site ceased to be occupied in the third century AD until a medieval fort was built there.

The city of **Vaishali** (25° 58', 80° 11') was located in and around the modern village of **Basarh**. The site finds repeated mention in Buddhist sources, as it was the capital of the Lichhavis and the venue for the second Buddhist Council. It was also the birthplace of Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism. The site is divided into two quarters. The Northwestern part is famous for a large, perhaps pre-Aśokan, Mauryan pillar and stupa. Various other antiquities have also been found there, including a large number of terracotta. These are mostly in the collection of the ASI site museum and the Patna museum. The occupational sequence at the site begins with BRW, followed by NBPW dated to around 500 BC. The remains of an ancient fort at the site, called Raja Vishāl-kā-Garh (the fort of King Vishāl) is named after the founder

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[218] For a general note on the archaeology of Buxar, see *IAR* 1963-64, p. 8.

of the city. Once again, several excavations have been carried out here (T. Bloch in 1904 – 04,[219] D. B. Spooner in 1913 – 14,[220] Krishna Deva and Mishra in 1950,[221] A.S. Altekar between 1958 – 62[222]). The geographical position of Vaishali, lying on the route to the Nepali Terai is significant art-historically. It explains the stylistic affinity that Early-Historic terracotta from Vaishali share with material from Tilaura-Kot.

Tilaura-Kot, the archaeological site, lies less than a kilometre away from the village of Tilaura in the Terai. There is some debate about whether the site is the ancient Kapilavastu, the capital of the Śākyas, the 'republican-tribe' of the Buddha.[223] The sites of **Ganwaria** and **Piprahwa** on the Indian side of the border, in Eastern UP, have also revealed a large number of early Buddhist structures, and these are often cited as the rival claimants to the designation of the original Kapilavastu.[224] The 1961-62 excavations at Tilaura-Kot established a more reliable stratigraphy for the site, with occupation going back to PGW and NBPW. A copious amount of human terracotta figurines were discovered at the site. Some of the antiquities recovered from there were destroyed in a fire at the Singha Durbar (where they were housed) in July 1973. Most of the surviving material is in the collection of the Department of Archaeology, Nepal at Kathmandu and the National Museum, Kathmandu.[225] However the controversy regarding the origins of the site may be resolved, what cannot be questioned is that this was a thriving Buddhist centre that also produced a large number of moulded terracotta plaques between approximately 150 BC and AD 100, and these form a part of the general stylistic idiom of the Middle-Gangetic Valley.

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[219] *ASI – AR,* 1903-04, p. 81.

[220] *ASI – AR,* 1913 – 14, p. 98.

[221] Krishna Deva and Mishra, V., 1961.

[222] Sinha, BP and Roy, SR, 1969.

[223] For a summary of the principal arguments see, Mishra, T.N.: 1977: pp. 23-25; and more recently, Khanal, P.: 2000: pp. 17 – 18.

[224] Srivastava, K.M.: 1986:; Mitra, Debala: 1971: pp. 247-53.

Lauriya-Nandangarh (26° 59', 84° 24'), about 15 miles Southwest of Bettiah in District Champaran, Bihar was first excavated by Bloch in 1904 – 05, and in 1906 – 07.[226] It was subsequently taken up for digging again by N.G. Majumdar[227] and A. Ghosh.[228] The site is in fact divided into two, Lauriya, as the name suggests in the local dialect refers to the area of the famous Aśokan pillar, and Nandangarh lies to its Southwest. The site is rich in Buddhist structures, and the remains of one of the stupas there shows that in its heyday it would have been one of the largest in the country. Bloch's excavations revealed two gold leaf repoussé plaques that show a lady who can be compared with Early-Historic terracotta goddesses of the third to second centuries BC. Yet, these pieces may, despite their possession of weapon-shaped hairpins and their typical posture with one hand akimbo, be given a date earlier than 200 BC on account of their archaeological context. These gold plaques are not unlike another that was found in Piprahwa that has been discussed in the previous Chapter. Because of the number of reliquaries, burial mounds and stupa remains, it was suggested that the site might have been an ancient funeral ground, associated with both Vedic and Buddhist traditions. Some of the terracotta images recovered from the site are housed in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.[229]

STYLES AND ICONOGRAPHIES

FEMALE FIGURES

The styles of **female figures** in the region are varied. The figurines from Buxar, briefly discussed in Chapter 2, have a distinct local sub-style. They have moulded faces affixed to hand modelled bodies, and are usually seated in what is called the 'European' pose. [*Figs. 3.156 – 3.161*] The sculpture is balanced on a tripod, where their own legs extend slightly

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[225] These have been variously published, see Manandhar, Sarla: 1984: pp. 1 – 12; Mishra, T.N.: *ibid.* 114 figurines discovered in the excavations of the Rissho University, Japan are to be found in a report, *Nepal Archaeological Research Report, Tilaurakot*, Vol. II.

[226] *ASI – AR*, 1906 – 07, p. 119. Excavations had also been attempted earlier by Cunningham in 1862, *ASI – AR*, 1, p. 68 and by Garrick and Carlleyle a few years later, also reported, *ASI – AR*, 16, p. 104 and, *ASI – AR*, 22, p. 47. But these excavations did not meet with any great success.

[227] *ASI – AR*, 1935-36, p.55; *ASI – AR*, 1936 – 37, p.47.

[228] Ghosh, A.: 1950:pp. 59 – 61.

[229] These have been published, Mukhopadhyay, SK.:1977: pp. 31-34.

forward and form the front two legs of the sculpture, and a stump below the figure's hip completes the arrangement. The body itself is slim, with a large face and breasts. The most fascinating feature of these pieces is their grand turbans and head-dresses. Surrounding their moulded faces, are several ornaments, which are made with the use of small stamps. In keeping with the general style of the times, they wear large circular earrings. These are either plain, with concentric bands, stippled or in the form of spiral whorls.

The convention of wearing large flat discs on the head is also a feature that began in the Mauryan period. In *Fig. 3.163* in the collection of the Patna Museum, the large modelled figure has a moulded face, and small appliqué jewellery decorates the piece. The figure's head-dress has three large discs on it, which derive no doubt from the similar tradition of wearing large lotus pistils on the hair, seen in other Mauryan terracotta. In *Fig.3.164* however, which is from a later date, the figurine is no longer part-modelled-part-moulded, but an entirely moulded plaque. Naturally, the discs are no longer affixed on the piece separately, but were incorporated into the mould itself. The technological shift apart, the style of the two figures is remarkably similar. Even though the free-standing Mauryan figure is in the round, it is essentially frontal. The moulded plaque is, perforce, two-dimensional; yet, the artist through the angles of the discs and the generally high relief introduces different planes and curves. Both the figures have slender long torsos, similar jewellery and hold their proper left hands akimbo. The pieces afford us an interesting comparison in the rendition of the facial features of the two, betraying the broader stylistic changes that were taking place between approximately 250 – 150 BC. In keeping with its earlier dating to the third to second century BC, the free-standing partly modelled piece has an elongated face with small features. The eyes are long and do not always have the double outline that was to become ubiquitous in the post-Mauryan pieces. In addition, the eyes of the earlier ('Mauryan') pieces are deeply set beneath a prominent eyebrow. By contrast, the face of the post-Mauryan figures generally becomes rounder and more sharply defined, each facial feature carefully articulated and at times, even highlighted by a double outline.

Other small fragments from this region are also useful in studying the transition of the style from the third to the first centuries BC. *Fig. 3.165* from Buxar, in the collection of the Patna Museum (No. 6829), also shows an image of a lady wearing discs on her hair. It can, stylistically, be dated to about the third to second century BC. She also wears large disc shaped earrings partly hidden under her robe extended over her head. Her facial features are closely related to the style of objects seen in the Mauryan period. This is true also of her physical form. Although fragmentary, we can assume that the proper left side of her hip would have been as exaggerated as the opposite side making her not unlike the figures on the Mauryan ring-stones studied in Chapter 2. However, by the first century BC, the style changes. *Fig. 3.166* from Tilaura-Kot in the Nepali Terai, housed in the Kathmandu National Museum (No. 33b), is a fairly typical representative of the general post-Mauryan style. The idea of the discs and lotus roundels on the head continues, but the face becomes more clearly defined, the piece on the whole more crisp, the jewellery decorative and carefully articulated.

More complete pieces also show the general attenuation in form, inclusion of contexts, and the establishment of an iconographic pattern that accompanies the change from one period to another. This can be seen in *Fig. 3.168* also from Tilaura-Kot, in the Kathmandu National Museum (No. 7). Like the pieces from the Upper-Gangetic Valley studied in the previous section of this chapter, this image of a **Lakṣmī related goddess** also stands in a water tank. The tank has lotuses emerging from it in the foreground of the plaque. In front of it is a *vedika* serving to demarcate the sacred space where a goddess stands upon a lotus. The background is dotted with small rosettes. Two suspension holes can be found at the top of the plaque.

That Tilaura-Kot was an important centre of ceramic art is borne out by the discovery of several other plaques. A popular iconographic convention at the site was to show a **lady with a bird.** [*Fig. 3.169*] This iconography has already been encountered at several other sites as well. A local preference for a turban shaped headdress can also be recorded. [*Fig. 3.170*] A similar style of turban is of course found at other sites as well, it just happens also to be common at Tilaura-Kot. Pieces with this headdress had been seen at Buxar, and broadly

contemporary ones from the same region include pieces from Patna, Vaishali and Lauriya-Nandangarh.[230] Mention may be made of a piece in the collection of the museum at Kumrahar, Patna (which houses objects discovered at the site itself). *Fig. 3.171*shows a lady with a turban that has small twigs and other leaves sticking out of it on one side. The idea of having only foliage, and no weapons in the headdress has been seen in other pieces mentioned in Sections 2 and 3 of this Chapter.

As with other **mother and child** groups in the rest of the Subcontinent, the female usually holds on to a male child in her proper left arm. [*Fig. 3.172*] The child is invariably dressed in the princely garb of a turban with two prongs and a necklace with several pendant beads fashioned as one or more *aṣtamangala* symbols. The post-Mauryan terracotta from the Middle-Gangetic Valley have broader, more thickly set facial features than those from UP or Bengal. This can be seen in the mother and child piece from Tilaura-Kot, where the full cheeks broad nose, large eyes and thick lips of the female can, on closer examination afford points of stylistic variance from other similar pieces from neighbouring regions.

A curious piece usually found in the Middle-Gangetic Valley is of a single female standing with a prominent bulge on the side of her proper right thigh. [*Fig. 3.173, 3. 174*] Her facial features and general technique of production are in keeping with the rest of the post-Mauryan moulded terracotta tradition. She holds one hand up just below her chest and the other falls by her side, over the enormous bulge. She is covered across both shoulders with a diaphanous shawl. A few pieces of jewellery show through the swathe of fabric including a chunky bracelet on her arm, large hoop earrings and a short necklace. The depiction of such pleated fabrics overlaid by finer ones allowed the artist to show off his skills. In a type similar to *Fig. 3.65* from the Upper-Gangetic Valley, *Fig. 3.174* shows a similarly attired female, completely covered in fabric with a high conical projection on her head.

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[230] Illustrated in Mukhopadhyay, Samir K., "Terracottas from Lauriya-Nandangarh in the Indian Museum, Calcutta", Lalit Kala 18, Figs. 5a,b.

A piece such as this poses interesting questions, none of which can easily be resolved. Most anthropomorphic imagery, particularly of females, is accompanied by certain accoutrements like a parasol or attendants that indicate the main figure's superior and divine status, none of which are available in this image. At other times, the figure can be situated in a context – a water tank or a pillared and arched shrine, again absent here. Neither is the image sufficiently stylised to a point where naturalism is deliberately eschewed in order that an 'essential' or divine nature is expressed. However, we have hardly any images of female figures that cannot be associated with divinity of some sort in this period. Deciphering the intent behind the production of such an image will have to remain open to question until further pieces may construct a sufficiently large body of evidence to base an analysis on.

The numbers of **female winged figures** found in this region remain as few as ones in the Upper-Gangetic Valley; they only grow popular in Bengal. Although denuded, *Fig.3.177* from Vaishali shows a lady with a decorated curved wing on her shoulder, a bow shaped headdress and the remains of typical discoid earrings. Her right hand would have been touching her earring, as is made apparent not just by the lines along which the piece has weathered, but by comparing the piece to an identical one subsequently excavated at the same site. The latter piece is, according to the excavator, one of the earliest anthropomorphic terracottas from Vaishali, dated stratigraphically between *c.* 300 – 150 BC. [231] Art-historically however, we can narrow that dating down to 200 – 150 BC, which is when both moulded plaques, and those exhibiting this style began to make a Subcontinental appearance.

Male Figures

Winged male figures are common in the region and have been found at several sites including Kumrahar [*Fig. 3.178*], Vaishali [*Fig. 3.179*] and Lauriya-Nandangarh.[232] *Fig. 3.179* is one of the first moulded terracottas of this style to be published, and has, ever since its

[231] Krishna Deva: 1961: p. 52 & Pl. XIVB-1.

[232] Mukhopadhyay, Samir K., *op. cit.* figs. 2a,b.

excavation in 1913-14 by Spooner, been illustrated in several publications thereafter.[233] It shows a figure with short feathery wings rising behind his shoulders standing on a lotus. Several other lotuses surround him, and he holds on to the stalks of two blooms in his hands. The figure wears a turban with a projection to one side typical to the period, roundels in the ears, one short necklace and another longer one extending to the middle of his chest, armbands, bracelets with tassels, and anklets. Two suspension holes have been driven into either side of his chest. The figure also has a small tasselled pouch (?) which falls on his left thigh, suspended from his girdle. Another image with the same iconography and attributes is in the Kanoria collection. [*Fig. 3.180, 3.181*] It is however, more detailed and decorative. Curiously, the figure wears a cross-shaped medallion on his chest. The pieces from Patna (Kumrahar) [*Fig. 3.178*] tend to be more plain, although they share the same general style and iconography. A similar plaque from an uncertain find-spot is in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 1387) [*Fig. 3.182*].[234] It too shows a tasselled end of a pouch or belt falling on the figure's left thigh - a stylistic convention shared with the large stone *Yakṣa* figures of Mauryan and post-Mauryan India.

MITHUNAS

Mithuna plaques are generally unexceptional in the area, the standard type showing a man and woman standing beside each other. The pieces are generally flat and moulded but are executed in high relief, and often the feet project forward, such that the piece would have been able to stand on its own feet, which would have formed a sort of pedestal. Since the plane of the image completely changes at the figures' ankles, it is the weakest point in the sculpture. As a result, there are few complete pieces and most of them are broken at the ankles. They are also usually weathered. *Fig. 3.183* in the collection of the Patna Museum (No. 1540) probably comes from Vaishali from where several other pieces of this common type hail. The woman stands to the left, wearing her hair in a bicornate arrangement with a central medallion and other typical pieces of jewellery. Two streamers suspended from the medallion

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[233] Gupta, PL. (1965), pl. XLVIII; Auboyer, J., 1981, fig. 405.

on her head, frame the figure. Otherwise, the figure seems to be nude. Her partner also wears his headgear in a style typical to the period. Other small traces of jewellery and clothing may be seen on his figure.

A most unusual and rare piece with *mithuna* related iconography from this region is housed in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras. [*Fig. 3.184*] Although the piece is made of gold, it expresses the same refined style associated with contemporary first century BC terracotta imagery from the region. The wafer thin repoussé plaque from Patna shows a richly adorned male with a bare torso wearing an intricately patterned *dhoti*, necklace and turban with a central projection. In his right hand he holds an indistinguishable spherical object and his left arm is around his short partner. The male figure has traces of a wing over his right shoulder. The female figure also has her torso bare with a scarf running over her ample breasts and across her right shoulder. She wears a pleated *dhoti* supported by a girdle which she holds on to with her right hand. This plaque is important on three accounts. First, it shows once again, the remarkable correspondences that exist between the 'minor' antiquities made in India between the second century BC and first century AD. These objects, which continued to be made in perishable media (fragile gold, terracotta etc.) share not just stylistic but iconographic similarities. They are related in varying degrees to their contemporary stone cousins which are for the most part Buddhist, and are also, as a result, slightly different. Second, the image is important for its iconography. Most metal or ivory images that have been seen from this period usually show iconic goddesses alone. Rarely, some others, such as the British Museum's Kulu vase[235], show more narrative scenes. However, yet another iconography is presented here, which finds its closest parallel in contemporary terracotta imagery. Third, the style of the image, and in particular the facial features deserve closer examination. The faces are slightly squarer and features more thickly set than the style of figures from any of the four other geographical regions considered in this study. In fact, the woman's face and hairstyle is closely related to the distinctive type of stone images excavated recently from Nongarh in

[234] Although not clear in the reproduction, it seems the same piece has been published by Moti Chandra, 1971, fig. 39, p. 10. However, he gives a different accession No. (22274) for it.

[235] Cribb, J. and Errington, E. (ed.) (1992): p. 162 -164

Bihar, and dated to the same period.[236] This allows us to cull a local Bihari stylistic oeuvre, invaluable in attributing the hundreds of surface collections from the region scattered in private collections. The style of the gold plaque is also compositionally similar to terracotta ones, where an otherwise two dimensional image is lent depth through both, high relief work and by allowing the feet of the sculpture to project forward.

'NARRATIVE' SCENES

An unusual plaque collected from the surface at Buxar unlike any other known from that site, demonstrates the variety that might once have existed in the terracotta arts of this region. [*Fig. 3.185*] The plaque is narrative in its character, yet the specific story it is seeking to tell can not be deciphered. Only the top right corner of a larger plaque remains. It has a suspension hole in one corner, and there would probably have been another on the opposite side to balance its weight. The orange-buff plaque breaks into white in the crevices where there is greater calcification. It is pressed out from a single-mould, and accommodates a large number of figures in a small surface area by reducing the scale of representation. It shows a central male figure of high rank, under a huge parasol, holding what seem to be either a pair of reigns or staffs. He is surrounded by seven other figures, all female, richly adorned, many of whom appear to be worshipfully folding their hands before him. This type of narrative plaque is more common in Bengal than any other part of the country. No other plaque with this scene is known from the Middle-Gangetic Valley. Further, hardly any moulded plaques, let alone those of such sophistication, have been reported from Buxar. The site is known for its three-dimensional figurines, discussed earlier. Although it is quite possible that the piece travelled from Bengal, I think it is likely that it was locally produced. The style of the individual female figures, all of whom wear different hats and turbans show a variety that is well known in the pre-existing Buxar figurines. Since the site has received scant archaeological attention, its many finds have not yet been reported. In my fieldwork at the site I found several

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[236] Chakrabarti, D.K., Prasad, A.K., *et. al.*, (1995): p.137, figs. 6-9

sophisticated moulded post-Mauryan terracottas now preserved mostly in the local Shri. Sitaram Upadhyay Museum that bear some stylistic similarities with this piece.

Although there are several rich sites like Buxar and Patna, no sites in the Middle-Gangetic Valley have revealed the sort of variety in moulded plaques as seen at Kaushambi or Chandraketugarh. Neither are the sites as prolific as the Upper or Lower-Gangetic Valley ones. However, they have revealed more moulded terracotta objects than the Northwest or Indo-Gangetic Divide. They form a crucial link between Mauryan and post-Mauryan images, and begin to show the trend towards fully moulded plaques, detailed decoration and attenuated figural representation at a date earlier than the rest of the Subcontinent. They span a wide variety of styles and iconographic types. Many of the figures seen here are also found at other sites in India, where they are also better preserved, and in the most part, better executed. That is to say that pieces from the two surrounding regions, (Upper and Lower Gangetic Valley), have a more decorative quality, are more naturalistic and generally with more figures compacted into the frame. Pieces from Bengal can have a more narrative purpose than Middle-Gangetic Valley ones. Exceptions to this are, however, available. Some of these have been discussed in the above survey. Not only does this region provide a link between the two major moulded-terracotta producing areas of the Upper and Lower-Gangetic Valleys, it is also art-historically valuable in studying the antecedents to the post-Mauryan style. Sites Like Buxar and Patna (Pataliputra / Kumrahar / Bulandibagh) which are particularly rich in their 'Mauryan' antiquities, reveal the strong bearing prevalent artistic styles of 'minor' antiquities had on the subsequent tradition(s). This antecedent history is valuable for two other reasons. As discussed in Chapter 2, first, they show that the chronology of many of the 'Mauryan' pieces, it is likely, span a broader period of production than previously believed. They might have commenced around the Fourth Century BC and continued into the late second or even early first century BC. This means that they were coeval, at least for a part of their history, with the styles of the fully moulded plaques. Second, the general history of the Mauryan rule, centred at Patna and the art-history of the monumental imagery (pillars and palaces) that the Mauryan dynasty might have directly patronised, show that they had incorporated many influences from Western Asiatic art styles. Lines of communication with Greeks and various

Western Asians were well established, traders and ambassadors travelled between the regions. This eclectic antecedent history is helpful in determining which stylistic elements influenced the pre-existing Indian traditions in the terracotta and stone arts that were to later be expressed in the post-Mauryan phase.

V: THE JEWELLER'S EYE–THE LOWER GANGETIC VALLEY: CHANDRAKETUGARH, TAMLUK, BANGARH, MAHASTHANGARH, MANGALKOT

A study of the terracotta the Lower-Gangetic Valley poses a host of problems encountered only in small measure in the rest of Subcontinent. No region of India has produced the same variety or quantity of post-Mauryan moulded terracotta. Neither can any other part of the country boast so consistently a refined and sophisticated artistic style as the Lower-Gangetic Valley. Yet the region remains poorly documented, archaeological data for the sites is seriously wanting, and above all, over the past two decades the area has been subject to the most indiscriminate illegal rifling for antiquities. This has left us with no contextual information. The sheer quantity (thousands) of objects from the region in private hands (of both collectors and dealers) internationally, reveals that the illicit digging is being consciously and systematically orchestrated. Entire sites have been desecrated, and we may already be too late in excavating the sites that held the desperately needed contextual information for the antiquities. Because the moulded terracotta from these sites now command exceedingly high prices, the incentive to make forgeries is great, and because the "fakes" have not be compared with securely excavated pieces, scholars and collectors alike naturally approach this area with scepticism. The 'problem' of "fakes" is however, an issue that is, in the case of the terracotta studied here, in itself a matter worthy of investigation, and is addressed in Appendix 2.

In this section, I have followed the general structure already seen in the previous four. First the principal archaeological sites of the region are introduced in order that excavated pieces may be geographically and chronologically contextualised. The following subsection surveys the objects from the region in groups. As the quantity of noteworthy and unpublished pieces is so great, each type deserves a further sub-section. These have been broken into Female Figures, Mithunas and Maithunas, Male Figures, 'Toy-Carts' and Rattles, and Animal Figures. In the end, the last sub-section discusses some miscellaneous pieces including pottery, fragments for architectural or general stylistic interest, and some others in media other than terracotta (such as ivory, bone, wood).

The sites discussed here encompass, broadly, the modern states of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Only a few of the relatively better documented ones have been mentioned. Several sites still remain unknown to scholarship, and even in the case of the known ones, their full archaeological potential has certainly not been recorded, as proved by the commercial availability of vast quantities of the objects from those regions.

With the growing international attention that terracotta from this region has started receiving, there has been a sudden rise in publications on the antiquities. These are mostly in the nature of indifferent notices. More recently however, two strains of discussion are emerging. The first seeks to ask a more art-historical question regarding who the figures depicted in terracotta are. This quest remains a desideratum, and the minimal efforts made in his regard, have not led to any wholly convincing argument. The second line of enquiry is one that has been recently opened. It addresses the chronology of the terracotta through a study of the sites, and the accompanying palaeographically significant discoveries. Various methods of dating have been proposed, and a number of hypotheses, none entirely convincing, are in currency. These have been discussed below.

BN Mukherjee's study on the palaeography of the (mostly) terracotta inscriptions[237] suggests that the script used in the region is an admixture of Brahmi and Kharoshti, dated to a broad period between the second century BC and the third to fourth centuries AD. He calls this "Kharoshti-Brahmi", following fundamentally a local Prakrit order, but using a mixed script of Brahmi and Kharoshti characters.[238] It is indeed possible that since the lower parts of Bengal served as important entrepôts, they were open to wide influences, and particularly as far as trading-seals are concerned, they may well have inscriptions of different scripts on them. Because Brahmi is read from left to right and Kharoshti from right to left, Mukherjee further says that the direction in which an inscription can be read depends on whether the initial letter

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[237] Mukherjee, BN: 1990

[238] Mukherjee, BN: 1990: pp. 9 – 15.

is Brahmi or Kharoshti.[239] This sounds too complicated an order, almost deliberately being imposed upon the individuality of a local script. Although the admixture of Brahmi and Kharoshti as he suggests is indeed possible, more palaeographic research is needed in this area. Mukherjee's fundamental hypothesis on the bi-scriptural nature of inscriptions, or even the development of a hybridised script with a combined syllabary of Kharoshti, (even some Aramaic as he says), and Brahmi inscriptions is plausible. However, the specifics of this script, and as a result, the reading of the inscriptions, need re-examination. Mukherjee has dated the inscribed pieces to no earlier than the 1st or 2nd centuries AD and up to the 5th century AD. However, the style of the anthropomorphic imagery on these pieces is known to come from stratigraphically earlier levels dated to the 2nd century BC; expressing the same broad artistic style as the rest of post –Mauryan terracotta art. Are we then to believe that the style of the figures on the plaques showed minimum progression over 600 years? Furthermore, the figures that are seen in this ostensibly broader period of production see little change not just in style but also, in both iconography and composition. If these figures span the 600 years that Mukherjee's hypothesis claims, they would also be the expression of an artistic style largely frozen and unchanging in Bengal, while the rest of India sees the dramatic vicissitudes of styles variously described as Sātvāhana, Kuṣāna and Gupta. In any case, even if the inscribed pieces are as late as the fifth century AD, that does not in any way alter our consideration, for art-historical studies, of the uninscribed figural terracotta plaques which were being made in an earlier period.

A second line of argument affecting the date of the terracotta images is based on the use of archaeological information. Although SK Mukherjee's article on the stratigraphy of the terracottas of Bengal[240] set out to propose a method of dating the terracotta, this was not fully explored or adequately addressed. A more recent attempt at re-dating the material, once again based on a consideration of the stratigraphy of the pieces has been conducted by Sima

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[239] Mukherjee, BN: 1990: p. 14

[240] Mukherjee, SK: 1991: 217 – 230.

Roy Chowdhury.[241] Her study suggests that many of the plaques usually bracketed in the immediate post-Mauryan period are actually to be dated, on the basis of their stratigraphy, to a time spanning 800 years from the second century BC to the sixth century AD. Although her analysis purports to be based on empirical scientific evidence, a few other factors need our consideration. The soil of Bengal is known to be one of the most shifting clays encountered in the world. The vast quantities of surface finds of the terracotta plaques themselves show how the soil periodically throws up buried objects in this frequently flooded plain that receives one of the highest amounts of seasonal rainfall in the world. Even in the case of Chandraketugarh, the most popular site in the region, the data available on the excavation itself hints to this difficulty. In studying the reports made from 1956-57 to 67-68,[242] it is clear that almost at every cutting that was made, a different set of layers were exposed, some with a greater number of Periods than others. An entry of 1962-63, half way through the decade long digging reads, "It may however, be mentioned that the incidence of Periods in this season's excavation *differs appreciably* from that obtained last year."[243] Further, even though some of the moulded plaques may have been found in later post-Kuṣāna levels, some were also found in earlier Maurya-Śunga ones. Not that this makes stratigraphy as an archaeological tool in [the terracotta producing sites of] Lower Bengal invalid, it certainly asks us to treat it with caution.

Second, as in the case of Mukherjee's hypothesis discussed above, are we to believe that the artistic style of the images seen here under goes such little change in 800 years; up to a period which saw the end of Gupta rule in India? Indeed there may be some minor changes in the style if the period of production of these images is spread over 800 years, but the changes are too slow. The style would then be almost worthy of being labelled static: which it certainly was not. How are we also to explain, in that case, that the iconography of these images

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[241] Roy Chowdhury, S.: 1998: pp. 54 – 105.

[242] See list of *IAR* entries *infra*. : f.n. 237.

[243] Italics mine. IAR: 1962-63: p. 47; compare with other entries, *infra*. : f.n. 237. Bautze has also noted these difficulties in using the stratigraphy of Chandraketugarh to date the pieces. He gives the example of the complete lack of consistency in the assemblages of the different levels called Period II at the site. In the 1956-57 campaign it was labelled "probably Maurya-Śunga", in 1957-58 it was "of the early Gupta

remains baffling up to a period when most of the known developments in the Indian pantheon had taken place in the rest of the country? Was Bengal so isolated, static, and unreceptive to change?

This argument that stresses a longer and more exclusive pattern of development in Bengal is part of a wider trend, which believes that pan-Indic presuppositions have all the necessary pitfalls of generalisations. Each region saw its own patterns of evolution and growth, and these need not move in tandem with the advances of the major dynasties or cultural traditions in the heartland of India. Indeed, this is true.[244] The regional variety of India provides different dynamics for both study and interpretation in the archaeology, religious predilections and art-history of individual parts of the Subcontinent. But to imagine a 'major' tradition expressed through thousands of terracottas remained so untouched in both purport and expression for 800 years, is unlikely.

It is true also, that perhaps we ought not to impose the results of investigations in the archaeology of the rest of the Subcontinent and the history of artistic styles of major stone imagery, upon the terracotta of Bengal. There are many drawbacks to making generalisations that redact the variety of Indian cultural traditions into a holistic cultural monism. To accede therefore that Bengal, which witnessed the most dominant expression of this form of terracotta art, continued with the tradition for longer than the first century AD, well into the Kuṣāna period (into the third century AD), is plausible. But that it remained unchanging to the fifth or sixth centuries AD is unlikely. Yet, even though I believe the images had a longer shelf-life in Bengal, I have bracketed most of them within the Second Century BC – First Century AD period. This is for several reasons, which require some explanation.

As indicated above, there may be some drawbacks in imposing the findings from the rest of the country on the art of a region. It results in imposing over the history of the entire

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age", in 1959-60 it was said to be as ancient as the period of NBPW and in 1961-62, period II was dated anywhere between the sixth to third centuries BC. See Bautze, J. K.: 1989: f.n.3, p. 126.

[244] See a summary of sociological and historical arguments (adapted to a study of Bengal) in this regard in Chakrabarti, Kunal: 2000: pp. 1 – 2, 4, 15 – 16.

Subcontinent a generalised discourse, when a more valid study may be to study the relative relationships between the particularities, whether regional or cultural. Kunal Chakrabarti has referred to this in his recent study of Early Medieval Bengal.[245] His analysis has also made some valuable contribution to an understanding of the dynamics of what the nature of the interrelationships between those particularities was in South Asia. Speaking of a period when Brahmanical hegemony was beginning to gain ground around the fifth century AD, he says, "While it is obvious that each regional tradition must be endowed with unique cultural characteristics to distinguish it from other similar traditions, I argue that the common factor of brahmanical presence in different degrees in each of these does not necessarily undermine their uniqueness."[246] He also says that, "clusters of fragmented, but interrelated indigenous local cultures could converge on a common core and acquire a wider identity which both included and transcended local specificities".[247] This paradigm is certainly true in the case of the general symbolic lexicon being used by the terracotta images of the scond century BC to first century AD as well. It is seen also through the interrelated iconographies and styles of the figures within the broad artistic oeuvre in the previous sections of this chapter. This chapter has shown how each region expressed its particularities that were related to the whole. A set, as it were, of shared indices or symbols were in currency, although their frequency in one region and individual meanings attached to them varied. Symbols are, after all, by definition, multivalent. "But the common form of the symbol helps to aggregate the various meanings assigned to it, just as the symbolic repertoire of a community aggregates the individual and the group differences that exist within the community".[248] This structure is in turn indicative of a culture that may be both collectively or particularly identified with. In that case, the coeval start of a style and method of producing images that are a part of the same broad tradition

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[245] Chakrabarti, K.: 2000: *ibid.*

[246] *ibid*: f.n.1, p.1.

[247] *ibid.*

[248] Chakrabarti, K.: 2000: p. 15 – 16. While I agree with Chakrabarti's method and basic argument, his deduction that early Medieval Bengal saw "the first imperfect awareness of a cultural community wider than those of parochial ethnic groups... emerge" is an argument that art-historians would find difficult to accept. 'Abiding themes', pan-Indic in their expression, had begun to emerge at least by the second century BC, his argument therefore is more applicable to the Early-Historic Period rather than the Early-Medieval. For a methodological study on the uses of symbols as conveyers of and expressions of culture, and the approaches available in interpreting them, see Leach, Edmund: 1976.

shared across the Subcontinent between the Second Century BC and First Century AD, must allow us to evaluate the regional specificity of Bengal within the same general trend. With similarity in underlying conception and expression, and variety only in a regional flavour – in both iconography and artistic style – it is only natural to study them along with their closest parallels from the rest of the country. Further, the studies on the implications of the stratigraphy of the sites from which these pieces hail and palaeography of the few inscribed pieces are both only in their inception, and are not yet conclusive tools to alter the dating patterns of the terracotta pieces.

Besides, even if the terracottas did span six or eight hundred years, that means their iconographic and stylistic idiom would have hardly seen any changes in that period. This iconography and style, the two main variables in this study, were seen to first develop between the second century BC and the first century AD. To discuss the following pieces as part of the tradition of this time frame, (while appreciating that they continued until about the third century AD in Bengal) is then understandable.

THE SITES OF THE LOWER GANGETIC VALLEY

The topography of these areas is very varied. One of the richest and oldest alluvial plains of the world, Bengal has been an ancient seat of civilisation. Boasting the deltas of two great world-rivers: the Brahmaputra and the Ganga, the river basin has served as an entrepôt to India.

Modern **Bangarh**, identified as the ancient Kotivarśa, lies near Dinajpur, West Bengal. The site is made up of a number of mounds, the main, which has been excavated, comprises a citadel of sorts, to the west of which lie the banks of the Punarbhava River. The excavation was

carried out under the aegis of Calcutta University and the ASI between 1938 – 41,[249] and revealed five strata of occupation at the site. The earliest (Stratum V), dated to the Early-Historic Period (approximately *c.*300 BC), where only a ring well was found, may not of course be the first sign of habitation at the site. This is shown by the discovery of pottery sherds of earlier periods in both, the original excavations[250] and in the recent explorations made by Chakrabarti *et al.*[251] The earliest evidence of moulded terracotta plaques at the site is in Stratum IV, ascribed by the excavators to the "Śunga Period" (Second to First Centuries BC).[252] The plaques[253] continue into what may be called the "Kuṣāna" Period at this site. Within the group of moulded plaques a number of different styles are seen, from the plainer figures, akin more to the types seen in Kaushambi and Lauriya-Nandangarh to the more lyrical ones of the sites of Southern Bengal. The other findings at the site from the same Stratum are in keeping with the nature of archaeological assemblages of the second century BC to first century AD. These include the typical grey ware, silver and copper punch marked coins and terracotta sealings with early Brahmi legends.

Mahasthangarh, Ancient Pundranagara, in modern Bangladesh is on the banks of the river Karatoya. The site comprises an oblong mound (1.5 x 1.2 km) beside some others scattered in the region. Significantly, it boasts a Mauryan Brahmi inscription, proving the eastern extent of Mauryan hegemony and showing also that the intervening region of Bengal was part of the international Mauryan trading empire. With the recent trends of studies in Bengal history and archaeology it seems that these trading relations were quite extensive from an early date. Although in Chakrabarti's detailed study of the archaeology of the site and its environs, only half a dozen moulded terracottas from the sites have been mentioned,[254] a much larger

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[249] Goswami, K.G.: 1948

[250] Goswami, K.G.: 1948:26 – 28, the presence of NBPW at the site has been noted also in Ghosh, A. (*ed.*): 1989: p. 47.

[251] Chakrabarti, D,K, and R. K Chattopadhyay: 1992; Chakrabarti, D.K., G. Sengupta, R.K. Chattopadhyay and N. Lahiri: 1993.

[252] Goswami, K.G.: 1948: 11.

[253] Goswami, K.G.: 1948: Pl. XIX – XXI.

number are known.[255] According to Ahmad's excavations at the site of Mahasthan, particularly in the area of Govind Bhita, seventeen strata of cultural deposits were found located over a depth of 25 feet.[256] The earliest phase at the site is at least of the third century BC. Once again, the moulded terracotta plaques come from a phase of broadly the second century BC to first century AD.

Mangalkot (23° 33', 87° 55'), along the eastern bank of the river Kunur is north of modern Burdwan in West Bengal. The Kunur links up both upstream and down, with an important array of other rivers, making the site conducive for trade. Of the three main mounds, Vikramadityer Dhibi was taken up for excavation by the Department of Archaeology, West Bengal, first in 1985, following which other seasons of digging have followed.[257] Of the seven stratified Periods discovered at the site, the earliest has been dated between the twelfth to sixth centuries BC, and the one revealing early moulded plaques, Period IV, to the first century BC to first century AD, and called "Śunga". The plaques were found along with cast copper coins, coarse NBPW and polished grey pottery.[258]

Chandraketugarh is rapidly earning the distinction of becoming one of the most significant sites of early Indian art. Located at 22° 41', 88° 42', in 24-Parganas District, 35 km Northeast of Calcutta, it covers about 3 sq. km, and spreads into the villages of Berachampa, Deolia, Hadipur, Shanpur and others. The site lies near the now dried up Padma, which would have been an active river known to the traders of the site. The river Vidyadhari now flows about five miles to its south. Both, the coffers of the State Museum of Bengal and the private collectors and dealers in the West are replete with objects from this site. Admittedly, the objects in private hands have to be examined with some circumspection as the incentive to forge these

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[254] In the collection of the National Museum, Dhaka.

[255] A vast number of terracotta plaques from the site and its surrounding areas have come to pass through the international trade in antiquities, and more recently are coming to light with the French Archaeological Mission currently at work there.

[256] As referred to by Chakrabarti, DK., 1992: p. 50.

[257] Ray, Amita: 1989.

plaques is high. The pieces from the excavation at the site lie in the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta, under whose aegis the excavations were carried out. A vast number of the excavated pieces have not been published, however, many of them were studied for this Chapter.[259] The inclusion of the pieces from private collections in the following study is therefore after a consideration of the excavated ones and those in the collection of West Bengal State Archaeology, against which they can be closely compared. One of the greatest drawbacks in studying pieces from Lower Bengal is that since no serious excavations are being carried out in the region, of the hundreds of surface collections, most of the best preserved pieces are coming into private hands. However, even the fragmentary pieces in the collections of the Asutosh and West Bengal State Archaeology Museums, are in themselves rich enough reserves of the material to conduct a detailed study of its style and against which the privately held pieces were studied before being included in this study.

Excavations at the site revealed about six Periods of habitation[260], the earliest, a Red-Slipped-Ware yielding - Period I. Subsequent layers include the Maurya- Śunga Period II, with NBPW, copper punch-marked coins, and terracotta figurines. In some of the cuttings, Period III has been identified as a late Śunga level, characterised by a red stamped ware (sometimes inscribed with Brahmi legends), cast copper coins and large numbers of moulded terracotta plaques. In some places, plaques were also found in the succeeding Kuṣāna period, but these do not necessarily show a discernible change in style. While some pieces may be more fluid in their expression, with greater amounts of decoration, more densely pleated garments and movement in the figures – features that may mistakenly lead us to assume they were Kuṣāna.

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[258] An extraordinary ivory image from the period addressed here was discovered at this site. It is now housed in the collection of the West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, No. 92.15.

[259] The Asutosh Museum is known for its generally uncooperative attitude towards research, with stringent regulations on the availability of photographs. They have however, a large number of their pieces on display. Together with several other photographs in the collection of Sima Roy Chowdhury and the illustrations in the volumes of *IAR* from 1955 – 56 to 1968 – 69, a corpus of data to be studied was established. I gratefully acknowledge the help of PK Mitra of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, and Sima Roy Chowdhury in Calcutta in assisting me in my study. The largest published group are in Biswas, SS. 1981.

[260] Goswami, KG: 1966, and a bibliography and summation of his excavations at the site in Ghosh, A. (*ed.*): 1989: pp. 95-96 (entry by DK Chakrabarti). See also *IAR*: vols. 1956 – 57: pp.29-30; 1957 – 58: pp.51 – 53, 72; 1958 – 59: pp.55-56, 76-77; 1959 – 60: pp.50-52, 77-8; 1960 – 61: pp.39-40; 1961 – 62: pp.62-63; 1962 – 63: pp.46-47; 1963 – 64: pp.63-65; 1964 – 65: pp.52-53; 1965 – 66: pp.29-60; 1966 – 67: p.48; 1967 – 68: p.50.

However, there are an equal number found in the "Kuṣāna" levels which show a more static and plainer style, usually thought of as slightly earlier, belonging to the second to first centuries BC. Again, as a result of this, I have conformed with the general second century BC to first century AD date which extends into the early "Kuṣāna" period. It is also period which witnesses *all* the separate elements of the pre-existing "Mauryan", "timeless", and immediate post-Mauryan traditions which can be compared to fully assess the nature of the transition in both idea and expression that was being made in this period.[261]

Tamluk (22° 20', 87° 55'), is the other major site in the region that has revealed large quantities of terracotta and other 'minor' antiquities also dated to the immediate post-Mauryan period. Tamluk is referred to extensively in ancient literature as Tamralipta, Damalipta, Tamralipi, etc. References by Ptolemy and Pliny to Taluctae and Tamalites may also refer to this site.[262] In 1951 Ramachandran reported at least 350 punch and cast copper coins from the Early-Historic Period,[263] many more have been found at the site subsequently. Even though the site was carefully explored and excavated to a limited degree,[264] we still have no clear record of the context of the civilisation that produced the many terracotta plaques. The site lies near the Rupnarayan river which merges with the Hooghly about 14 km to the South. Periods II and III of the limited excavations at the site have revealed moulded terracotta plaques. These are usually ascribed a 'Śunga' and 'Kuṣāna' date. Importantly, Period III preserved evidence of the international contacts this witnessed in the form of Rouletted and other wares associated with Roman trade and carnelian intaglio seals with foreign motifs. Subsequent explorations have furthered our information of the site where habitation can now, albeit in a slightly sketchy manner, be traced from a Neolithic-Chalcolithic phase through NBPW to the Early-Historic Period, and beyond.[265] The first moulded post-Mauryan terracotta recorded by modern scholarship, and still one of the finest pieces discovered from the period,

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[261] Some of the other arguments in conforming to these dates have been outlined earlier in this chapter.

[262] Ramachandran, T.N.: 1951: pp. 226 – 229.

[263] Ramachandran, T.N.: 1951: pp. 230 – 233.

[264] *IAR*: 1954 – 55: p. 19, Ghosh, A. (*ed.*): 1989: pp. 430-31, Mandal, PK: 1987: pp. 1-7.

is an often-published plaque from this site, in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.[266]

Apart from Chandraketugarh and Tamluk in Southern Bengal, a large number of sites have also revealed sophisticated terracotta imagery in varying degrees, however the surface collections have never been systematically recorded. Tamluk and Chandraketugarh have been discussed in greater detail here, as they can serve as a guide against which the stylistically comparable material from the region can be studied.[267] This is particularly helpful when it comes to studying the vast numbers of privately held and other surface collections. The names Tamluk and Chandraketugarh are therefore used generically by writers for the style as a whole. In this chapter however, when pieces are known to definitely come from one of these sites, that has been mentioned. Otherwise, I have preferred using the more non-committal 'Lower Bengal' except when the style of the piece may indicate an affinity with one of the sites, on the basis of which it may tentatively be grouped with that site. By and large, the pieces in the collections of the Indian Museum, ASI, West Bengal State Archaeology and Asutosh Museum have a strong provenance behind them.

STYLES AND ICONOGRAPHIC VARIETIES

Bengal presents us with an almost overwhelming array of iconographic types. These inhabit some variety in style too, which can, at times, be conditioned both, temporally or spatially: spanning the second century BC to the first century AD in its formative period (although the general style itself seems to have continued into the third century AD), and expressing some variety depending on whether they hail from North or South Bengal. Southern Bengali terracotta, include those made in both, North and South 24-Parganas District (viz. Chandraketugarh and Harinarayanpur) and Midnapore District (Tamluk). As a general rule of

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[265] Dasgupta, PC: 1975

[266] The piece has been discussed in greater detail later.

[267] The sites surrounding Tamluk have been listed and mapped by Mandal, PK: 1987: pp 4-5.

thumb, (naturally with all the occasional exceptions rules of thumb have), Southern Bengali sites are not only more productive, they are also more decorative, daring in their compositions and all together more sophisticated than the others. At times, the penchant for the decorative, usually accomplished by an overdose of fine stippling, can lead to a fussy effect.

FEMALE FIGURES

Because there are an overwhelming number of moulded plaques from Bengal, one tends to overlook the few examples of antecedent terracotta traditions in the region. *Fig. 3.186* was excavated from Tamluk, and lies in the collection of the ASI at Purana Qila, Delhi. The piece has all the characteristics of ancient figural imagery, popular at sites along the Ganga: dark grey, with a bird shaped head, holding a child in her lap. As she expresses none of the stylistic features that can allow us to immediately bracket her into a particular period of production, she may be classified, as per Kramrisch, as a "timeless" figure. Such figures may come from many different periods, but when they come from excavations, (like this piece), we can be more confident in ascribing a period of production for these images. A Mauryan ascription for this piece would be in keeping with not just the context of its excavation, but also on account of its lustrous dark grey firing and limited use of stamps to indicate jewellery. A small group of pieces have been found at Tamluk which are made of a dark grey clay. They lack the overly ornate, or generally sophisticated appearance of the cream – buff terracotta of the first century BC and are stylistically akin to Mauryan pieces familiar to us from Mathura and other sites. An excavated piece of this type is in the collection of the ASI, Purana Qila, Delhi (No. CAC 85.17/59). The presence of such figures at Tamluk or any other site, proves once again, that a pre-existing image making tradition was active in the region. This was significantly altered and re-defined in the post-Mauryan period.

A few pieces from Tamluk also allow us to try and suggest the transition from the earlier animistic and more rudimentary figures to developed anthropomorphic representations on plaques. [*Fig. 3.187 a and b*] in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Acc. No.

1994-148-294) was excavated at Tamluk.[268] Since its stratigraphy is not reliable, the piece may be dated, stylistically to the second century BC. Buff in colour, it shows a lady with one hand akimbo and the other falling by her side holding on to her skirt. The face is moulded and the body modelled, as was popular in the period. In addition her face is positioned to point slightly upward, a legacy no doubt of a compositional strategy of Mauryan terracotta, as are the stamped appliqué jewellery, discs on her head, and skirt billowing to the right. (Compare figs. 3.173, 3.174 from the previous section.) The transitional nature of the piece becomes more apparent by examining the figure's back and face. The cheeks are fuller than Mauryan figures, and veering towards the style of the moulded plaques. Although the body is modelled, the artisan has forgone the opportunity to sculpt the figure in the round and has instead smoothened the back with clay, filling any interstitial gaps that would have freed the limbs from the body, as if it were a plaque pressed out of a mould.

One of the best preserved examples of the slightly later, (first century BC to first century AD), fully moulded **enshrined goddesses** from Southern Bengal is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York.[269] [*Fig. 3.188*] A large profusely jewelled goddess stands with ten *āyudhas* in her hair in the middle, flanked by five attendants. She holds one hand akimbo while the lowered right is bestowing something, collected in a bowl held in the right hand of a male attendant / worshipper. The turbaned female attendant to her immediate left holds up a large parasol under which the goddess stands. The two female attendants at the extremities of the plaque hold up large fans decorated with tiny rosettes. The whole scene is framed by two pillars with bell shaped capitals, crowned by squatting atlantes supporting a roof. The style of the roof with its pyramidal repeating projections is supported on a horizontal bar with alternating circular and rectangular dowels, betraying the contemporary practice of architecture in wood. The symbol of the fish on the top right of the plaque is in fact the finial of a standard (or *dhvaja*), often seen in association with such figures. Opposite it is a flying *Kinnara* or *Gandharva* with a human torso, wings and the lower part of a bird. Flying *Kinnaras*

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[268] Mentioned by Ramachandran, T.N.: 1951: pl. I fig.1, pp. 228, 237. He also mentions that it was found six feet below the ground level, and compares its style with its close parallels from Pataliputra.

[269] Accession No. 1990.281. Published previously in several notices and by Bautze, J.K.: 1995: Pl. XII.

and *Gandharvas* are well known in contemporary Buddhist imagery in stone at sites like Bharhut, Sanchi and others where they usually flank some symbolic reference to the Buddha. The entire background of the plaque is filled with tiny floral motifs, and stipples.

The artist has brought in considerable variety in the composition of the figures. The goddess and the attendant to her left are shown frontally, whereas in the male worshipper to the goddess's right the artist has tried to show a three-quarter profile. The fragmentary remains of the face at the bottom left of the plaque is in full profile, and the attendants at the extremities stand with their backs to the viewer.

Fig. 3.189, in a private collection, also shows a similar theme. An enshrined goddess stands tall on a pedestal, with the usual weapons in her hair, her left hand at her waist, the right in a boon bestowing gesture. Her only male worshipper stands below this hand, holding a small dish. Another worshipper, female, stands opposite him holding a tray of floral offerings over her head. Only one other *cauri*-bearing attendant is fully preserved. Traces of a large *chhatri* (parasol) can be seen over the central figure adding to her all-important divine status. Although the top left corner of the plaque is broken, it might have had the face of a female attendant and another five weapons in the goddess's coif to balance the composition. The plaque is framed by two tall pillars which issue from earthen pots, alluding to the well-trodden symbolism of the *pūrnaghata*. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this piece is the presence of consciously depicted sacred motifs (*mangalas*) on her pedestal. These include four palm prints, all from the auspicious right hand, a parasol, flower buds and two conical objects which might be related to fly-whisks or cornucopias. Around the pedestal, the artist has tried to show a *vedika* or fence to demarcate the sacred space. These are not uncommon motifs for the period. To see them represented together, not only expresses the presence of a collectively shared cognitive order referred to in Chapter 3, but also how the terracotta, like their contemporary stone sculptures, dipped into the same symbolic language. The goddess wears a *tilak* on her forehead, a trend to which images at Bharhut are also predisposed. Her earrings follow the convention of one being shown laterally while the other disc is close to her

ear. Suspended from her headgear are two other pieces of jewellery shaped like elongated flower buds that fall over her ears, another feature commonly seen in the images from Bengal.

Several plaques survive where the goddess is shown standing on a round bottomed earthen pot. This underscores the importance of the pot as a symbol of the *pūrnaghata*, pot of plenty. Usually, punch marked coins, of the kind known to be in currency at the time, are shown over the surface of the pot. The goddess, quite literally, bestows prosperity and wealth over the pot of plenty. Illustrated here are a piece from Chandraketugarh in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta [*Fig. 3.190*], and another in a private collection [*Fig. 3.191*]. Many other similar and better preserved pieces have been reported from Tamluk[270] and private collections.[271]

The general compositional formula of the larger rectangular plaques with a single enshrined goddess, flanked by concomitant worshippers and disciples, is quite standardised. The goddess wears weapons in her hair, usually ten in the larger plaques, but the number may be twelve, five, or rarely, six. Details in the architecture can also vary slightly, although the overall schema remain the same. The general shape of the pillars is of the type first seen in the case of Mauryan free standing ones: plain verticals, with bell shaped capitals and crowning animals. However, these are now brought into an architectural setting, made more decorative, the crowning figure is often a squatting pot-bellied atlas, the pillar may issue from a *pūrnaghata* and is usually associated with some sort of leafy foliage. At times addorsed animals (usually horses or lions) may crown the pillars, similar to the two-dimensional depictions in Sanchi. The stepped merlons or pyramidal projections on the roofs of buildings seem to be another standardised form of wooden architecture in the period - the motif commonly repeated in Early-Historic sculpture. In *Fig. 3.192* from Chandraketugarh, a row of pendant lozenges from the roof may allude to mango leaves, a symbol associated with auspiciousness and to ward off evil in subsequent Indian tradition.

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[270] Ramachandran, TN: 1951: p. 237, no. 8.

The variety within the contemporary grammar of style and symbol can further be seen in *Fig. 3.193* where instead of the more common rectangular format the plaque has a curved top. A pillar to the goddesses left performs no architectural function: It is free standing and crowned by an atlas. The usual text-book symmetry of balancing each element in a composition with another identical motif on the opposite side, also has been eschewed. The pillar stands alone, as does the large peacock on the top left. The goddess herself, resplendent in her jewellery and ten weapons, blesses her female devotee on her left by lowering her palm over her head. The goddess holds up a fruit in her other hand. A male attendant stands to her right. His two-pronged headgear is often seen on male figures from Chandraketugarh. The male and female worshippers may together be an allusion to a donor couple. The whole scene is set before a backdrop of large blossoms. A parrot sits in-between the flowers on the goddess's right.

The goddess's gesture of blessing her devotee is repeated in a number of plaques, and is found in both Chandraketugarh and Kaushambi.[272] In *Fig. 3.194* in a private collection, the goddess with five weapons in her hair, places her right hand over her female attendant's head. The attendant carries a circular object with a handle, probably a mirror. Two suspension holes are driven into either side of the central figure's waist. Typical of Southern Bengali workmanship, the jewellery is detailed, the plaque is crisp and expressive. The lower portion of the relief extends forward, so that the feet of the image break the two-dimensional plane of the rest of the surface. The border of the irregularly shaped plaque bears small florets. An almost identical plaque to the one from Chandraketugarh discussed here was found at Kaushambi. It lies in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (No. 5428).[273] The images are the same in size and composition, yet their state of preservation and the articulation of detail are vastly different. And herein lies one of the differences between the terracotta arts of these two prodigious sites.

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[271] Bautze, JK: 1995: Pl. XIII.

[272] A goddess with a similar gesture from Kaushambi is illustrated in Poster, Amy: 1986: fig. 27, p. 98.

[273] See Kala, S.C.: 1980: fig. 28

Even from the limited examples illustrated above, it is clear that that the styles of Lower Bengal are unquestionably more ornate and detailed, with a greater amount of contextual information than the rest of the Subcontinent. Recently, a group of very large plaques (about 50 x 30 cm) have come to light. Their style is more bold, the decorative stipples larger, and the plaques are thick. However, they lack a stratigraphic authenticity and also have not been tested yet by thermoluminescence. I have chosen therefore, to err on the side of caution here, and excluded them from this study until more reliable data on such images is available. Their presence however, should be noted. While plaques of this sort are rare, those with figures enshrined in an architectural context are not. Even more popular however, are images of single female figures.

The most famous of all Early-Historic, post-Mauryan terracottas is a plaque in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. [*Fig. 3.195-a*] Discovered at Tamluk in 1883, the plaque lay in the collection of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta before it came into the possession of the Indian Institute at Oxford and thence to its present home at the Ashmolean. However, somewhere along its journey its provenance was lost to scholarship: E. H. Johnston rediscovered it in 1938 at the India Institute, and suggested that it might have come from Kaushambi where excavations had, by that time, revealed similar figures.[274] However, in 1949, SK Saraswati confirmed that the image was from Tamluk.[275] Subsequent excavations in Lower Bengal have also afforded us several comparable images, (*Fig. 3.196* is an example of a piece with a similar iconography excavated from stratum 8 at Tamluk) whereby the style of the Bengali images can be studied as a distinct idiom within the corpus of post-Mauryan sculpture. "The Oxford Plaque", as it has come to be known, is one of the finest examples of that style.

The pose and iconographic attributes of the *āyudhas* in her hair, one arm at her waist, the excessive jewellery, one extended bolster-like earring, bicornate headgear, prominent girdle –

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[274] Johnston, E.H. : 1938 – 39: Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology XII, Pl. V

[275] Saraswati, S. K.: 1949: pp. 174 – 75; and Saraswati, S. K.: Early Sculpture of Bengal: Ch. 8, n.9, pp. 96 – 102.

so familiar to us from the images discussed from the rest of India – were all brought to light for the first time through this image. At the same time, the image is distinctive. Behind the jewellery, fine lines indicate a garment that covers her legs, torso and is draped over her left shoulder. A long sash is draped over her stocky arms. This costume is unusual: More commonly, the torso may be left bare – covered only by jewellery or, when clothed, by a stitched coat or draped shawl – in either case, both shoulders are covered. The nature of this figure's jewellery also, is mirrored in very few other plaques. This includes the almost imperceptible fish tailed elephant, *makara* and deer shaped buckles arranged diagonally along her torso and small humanoid figures fashioned into the tassels that fall from her girdle on to her thighs. [*Fig. 3.195 b and c*]These figures look like the small pot-bellied *Yakṣa* figures. Two little suspension holes are to be found on either side of the goddess's constricted waistband. The fashioning of jewellery into zoomorphic or anthropomorphic shapes has not so far, been reported from sites other than Bengal, and even there, it is rare. Another example of a deer shaped buckle on the waist of the image, can be seen in [*Fig. 3.197*] also from the same region.

The presence of the five weapons in this goddess's headdress, prompted Kramrisch to suggest that she was the *Apsaras Pañcacuda* (five crested). Thereafter, the word came into common art-historical currency, even though many figures have been found subsequently that have more or less than five weapons in their hair. The fascination with the iconography of this goddess has intrigued scholarship for over a century, the general cultural needs that she may have fulfilled are discussed in the following chapter.

Images with this iconography have also started being found in a wide variety of other media such as wood [*Fig. 3.198*], ivory / bone and very rarely in metal (discussed earlier, in the sections concerning Kaushambi and Bannu). Yet curiously, there are no stone images with the iconography of the goddess with weapons in her hair.[276] Admittedly, the stone sculptures of the period are largely Buddhist, and this might be a goddess who was not absorbed into their

pantheon. Further, the iconographic continuities are seen across what are usually labelled 'minor' antiquities; images that would have been more readily available, and objects of personalised devotion unlike the more public stone imagery of contemporary Buddhism.

There appears to be some confusion regarding how these intricate plaques were manufactured. For the most part they were just single pulls from moulds with little or no secondary retouching. Several moulds for such figures have been found at nearly every excavation in the Subcontinent. They are also made of terracotta. Clay, either liquid or of putty like consistency would have been poured / pressed into these moulds. The prefired, unglazed moulds are porous, and soak the water in which the clay is suspended very rapidly. Soon the moulded impression shrinks, and begins to prise off the mould. The plaque shrinks further during firing, and this makes the workmanship on the plaque seem finer. Once ready, the plaque could of course be used to make more moulds, and the resultant impressions from those moulds would be even more intricate and detailed. However, it has been suggested that the plaques were pressed out of plain moulds and small stamps and moulds were used subsequently to press the fine detail into the clay.[277] There seems to be little proof for this. The moulds found, particularly in Bengal, are very fine and the modern clay and plaster casts pressed from them appear to be complete, with no need for any retouching. Undoubtedly, sharp scrapers and other tools could have been used to tidy the impressions, but at least in the case of the fully moulded plaques, it is unlikely that several moulds were used to create one piece. In fact, it is likely that some original moulds might have come into the possession of individuals these days who may be pressing images from them, accounting for the large numbers of similar plaques appearing in the market. The high quality of the moulds and their recent impressions can be seen in [*Fig. 3.200 a and b*] in the collection of the State

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[276] The only example in stone, is an unpublished third century AD limestone figure from a stupa railing in Goli District, Andhra Pradesh, in the collection of the British Museum.

[277] Bautze, J. K.: 1995: pp. 5 – 7. He suggests that the lack of detailing, for instance the tiny pearls and incised drapery, so common in Bengali terracotta, are missing in these moulds and their impressions. However, a magnified look at these pieces shows that these details were present. The pieces would of course, as he says, have been tidied, features highlighted through incisions when the plaques were leather-hard. This accounts for some of the minor variations between two almost identical plaques, so often encountered in this region.

Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta and in *Fig. 3.201 a, b and c* in the collection of the Ashmolean, Oxford.

The Oxford mould is interesting also for the headdress of the attendant female. Conical in shape it is impressed with three rows of circular bosses sandwiched between fine 'pearl' borders, ending, on top, in a head of a cockerel. Another example of such a headdress from Chandraketugarh is in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta. The shape of the cap is not native to India, but one known to have been popular in Central Asia in the realm of the Śakas (Scythians) and Kuṣānas and is related ultimately to the form of Phrygian caps. Influences usually thought of as entering the Subcontinent no earlier than the first century BC. Once again, it is therefore likely, that plaques of this nature continued to be manufactured in Bengal for a slightly longer period than the rest of the country, expressing some of the more recent changes that were influencing them.

Attendants to goddesses can carry various attributes that both enhance the status of the divinity (such as the fan, mirror, *chhatra,* and *cauri*), and reveal the attitude of the worshippers. Not only do the plaques reveal that the devotee is the recipient of his goddess's benefaction (the showering of coins), but they also show what the nature of ritual worship involved. Like the plaque where an attendant carries flowers to the shrine, [*Fig. 3.202*] in a private collection shows the devotee carrying a tray of fruit and sweetmeats over her head to be blessed by the goddess – alluding to the personalised nature of the propitiation of the godhead. This is one of the most defining characteristics of Indic faiths – an aspect of ritual, referred to and understood at many levels. At its most basic, it is an aspect of *pūjā*, a natural consequence of devotion to a personalised godhead. This is hardly surprising since the overwhelming iconographic consistency of this goddess across the Subcontinent underscores her theistic cult.

This can be seen in the fragmentary remains of another particularly large plaque from Chandraketugarh in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, [*Fig. 3.203*] where the feet of goddess are preserved elevated on a cushion beside

which stands a diminutive attendant carrying a tray of vessels and fruit over her head. Next to her is a large squatting atlas like figure, which would perhaps have been in the centre of the plaque, were it complete. In that case we can speculate that the *main* divinity might have stood over this atlas.

Figures can also be **associated with specific animals, particularly birds**. It has generally been assumed, as Gautam Sengupta says, that figures with cranes are more popular at Boral, swans at Chandraketugarh, parrots at Pokharna and deer at Bangarh.[278] However, these assumptions are yet to be empirically proved. Although the ten-crested figure [*Fig. 3.204*] is seen with a bird, we cannot determine whether it is a swan or a crane as the lower part of the plaque is damaged, and the height of the bird is unclear. At any rate, even if we could identify the bird, it need not allow us to ascribe a provenance for the plaque with any assurance. The plaque is of stylistic importance for other reasons. Both, the shape of her knotted sash across her hips and necklace of single beads falling between her breasts are features not commonly seen in Indian art before the early first century AD, and that might help us in dating this piece.

Just as the iconographic variety in female figures in the rest of the India extended beyond the possession of weapons in their hair, the same is true in Bengal. Once again, one of the most popular traits is the presence of wings on the shoulders of the figures. **Winged females** are less common than males. Their presence however, undermines the idea that all winged figures must be regarded as early manifestations of the god Sūrya.[279]

Many of the winged figures, particularly from Tamluk, strike a balance between graceful movement, detailing in the jewelled wings and areas of undecorated clean space. The latter, a quality seldom sought in the Lower Bengal pieces. The dancerly posture of *Fig. 3.205* from the Site Museum at Tamluk can be used as an indicator of the attitude that can be associated with such figures. Whether divine or semi-divine, conscious attitudes of dance have played an important role in Indian imagery henceforth. Dance may refer to both, a physical possession

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[278] Sengupta, G. : "Early Terracotta of Bengal: A Note Defining Some Problems": p. 244.

of an attitude that might have been ritually reproduced by the devout, and, allude to higher spiritual messages through its own language of gesture and pose – performing much the same function that 'divine' dances play till today.

Plaques with a lady in a sharp *tribhanga* pose, with their arms raised over their head and right leg bent at the knee are one of the most common iconographies for **dancerly figures**. This can be seen in two plaques, [*Figs. 3206, 3.207*] both in private collections. The ladies are broad hipped and their posture and physiognomy recall the bracket figures on the Sanchi *toranas*. At the same time, the jewellery of these figures is very much of the type rooted in the tradition of terracotta art in India. All the individual elements of the jewellery are familiar to us from previous pieces, and there is little point in reiterating them here. Her hairstyle however, is one that has not been encountered so far. Her wavy hair is parted in the centre, and left exposed. It is decorated with flowers and twisting ribbon like bands.

In some figures their open tresses are resolved into several braids, similar in conception to the pieces from the Mathura region discussed earlier. This can be seen in a most unusual piece in the collection of the Ashmolean, Oxford. [*Fig. 3.208*] The lady stands with almost liquid movement in her body, enhanced by the swaying beaded panels suspended from the girdle. No attempt has been made to compensate for her nudity by pouring excessive amounts of jewellery over the figure, as was usually the case. Instead, the highly decorated beaded panels weighing her girdle down highlight the nudity of her attenuated torso. Her other jewellery is also relatively sparse: six simple bracelets on each arm, a short necklace with a large central bead and a prominent tubular earring suspended from her right ear. Two suspension holes are driven into either side of her waist.

Most of these 'dancing' figures are not associated with any supernatural quality. A piece in the Kanoria collection however, shows a female figure in the frequent dancerly pose where her arms are locked over her head. [*Fig. 3.209*] However, she wears the typical five weapons in

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[279] As suggested by Sengupta, G.: *ibid.*: p. 244.

her hair usually seen in more heraldic goddesses. Once again, as we have seen in other parts of India, distinctions between the modern categories of 'religious' and 'secular' are too blurred to be used.

The 'religious' nature of these plaques where the figures are not invested with any immediately discernible supernatural attribute like weapons, a shrine or attendants can not be satisfactorily resolved. Yet, the fact that their beauty and gracefulness are deliberately brought out by the artists can not be questioned. All too often scholarship is bedevilled with the categorisation of figures into 'religious' and 'secular' groups. A categorisation that unfortunately comes in the way of our appreciation of the development of the nature of Indian sculpture. In the case of Kuṣāna and post-Kuṣāna images, the complimentary qualities of grace and beauty serving to 'please' and attract the viewer on the one hand and supernatural religious detachment on the other are so integrated, that art-history has come to expect little else. In the case of imagery that *begins* in the immediately pre-Kuṣāna world however (although it continues into the third century in Bengal), the dynamics are slightly different. We do not know who these figures are. Naturally, the first quest remains to ask of these images their identity. This can only be achieved to a very limited extent. However, while art-historical discourse continues to investigate / deliberate these aspects, we must not lose sight of the changing dynamics of sculptural aesthetics introduced in this period – qualities that are to become the mainstay of Indian art henceforth. Therefore, even though we do not know what the religious import of the more graceful / dancerly figures was, that does not preclude us from appreciating the simultaneous expression of these dual goals by the Early-Historic artists.

One of the finest pieces in the Kanoria collection comes from an unrecorded site in Bengal. [*Fig. 3.210 a and b*] The fragmentary moulded plaque is made from a very pale coloured clay seen only in that region.[280] Made with considerable skill, it preserves the bust of a lady resting her gracefully bent head on her left hand. Her open hair, upward dreamy gaze, slight smile and finely articulated jewellery bespeak an all-together hitherto unknown quality of post-

[280] Published in Poster, Amy: 1986: p. 100, No. 30; Bautze, J.K.: 1995: Pl. XXXIII-b.

Mauryan workmanship. The intricacy of the mould that would have been used can be seen in the details of the torque and pendant suspended from a necklace that falls just above her breasts. Apart from the colour of the clay, her Bengali origin is betrayed by the overall sensitivity in her characterisation, her full and rounded face and the rows of pendant 'pearls' suspended from her hooped earrings and armbands, qualities familiar to us from the other pieces from this region.

The desire to represent women in an attitude of *śrngāra* has been seen in other parts of the country as well. Another piece from Bengal which shows a woman looking into a mirror while she adjusts her hairdo (in the Kanoria collection) reminds us of similar pieces from the Mathura region discussed earlier. [*Fig. 3.211*] The small spouted pot with a rounded handle over its lip at the bottom right, is also seen in plaques from this region, particularly the *mithuna* and *maithuna* scenes where it is placed either between the figures or under the bed. These are discussed later.

Some other female figures are seen in association with other features like a *cauri* in [*Fig. 3.212*] or a bow harp in [*Fig. 3.213*]. The desire to make a *cauri* bearer into an independent plaque and not one that is an attendant to a goddess can perhaps be better understood if we contextualise this piece within the wider frame of contemporary Indian sculpture where free standing stone sculptures of *yakṣīs* at times carry *cauris*. However, even in the case of the stone sculptures, it is not clear whether they were attendant figures or *yakṣīs* worthy of worship in their own right.[281] The same set of arguments can be brought to bear here. It is possible that this plaque was suspended next to one of a divine figure, or perhaps, this itself is a divine figure.[282]

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[281] See for instance the many controversies that surround the Didarganj *cauri* bearer in Morris, R. 1989, Ray, NR 1975, Gupta, SP 1980, Coomaraswamy, 1928 (b), and more recently, in an attempt to date her in the Kuṣāna period: Frederick Asher and Walter Spink: 1990: "Maurya Figural Sculpture Reconsidered", *Ars Orientalis 19*, pp 1 - 25.

[282] A single plaque of a supernatural figure with weapons in her hair holding a *cauri* in her hair was found at Mathura. This could represent a goddess whose attribute was a fly-whisk. See Kala, S.C.: 1980: p. 38.

Of the **mother and child** types in Bengal, one genus is more popular than others in Lower Bengal. It shows a tall woman with her hair drawn into a high knotted bouffant carrying a child straddled across her right hip. [*Fig. 3.214*] The child is always male, and is usually nude but for his jewellery and turban. Sometimes the turban can have two prongs or batons on top; these are typically worn by men in Bengal.[283] Sometimes, mother and child groups can be hollow, double-moulded images. In this case, the female figure is usually seated on a stool as in [*Fig. 3.215 a and b*], however standing ones are also known. Here the simply adorned female in a double-string girdle, a short necklace composed of two triratna pendants and a bead; with large exposed breasts, sits with a child on her left thigh. Few pieces of this sort have been found in excavations. The pose and style of the seated 'mother' figure with her squashed torso, large breasts and disproportionately large face are in sharp contrast to the refined forms seen on the plaques. However, figures in this style are not unknown in the period between the first century BC and second century AD. Apart from the numerous close parallels that this figure has in terracotta, the hairstyle can be compared, once again, with the large images of *yakṣīs* made in stone[284] and the seated pose and physiognomy with a group of recently excavated images from Nongarh in Bihar.[285] The Nongarh figures have been dated to the first century BC. However, they have an all-together more fierce appearance than these pieces. What must be noted however, is that such poses and attitudes were intimately concerned with fertility, and formed part of the general sculptural output of the period, coexistent with the styles of Bharhut and Sanchi on the one hand, and with the styles of terracotta, ivory and wooden images on the other.

Of the relatively frequently found headdresses in the region, apart from the ones already referred to, another deserves special mention. Here the hair is drawn up high almost directly over the head in a large bun separated by a narrow constriction that is marked by rows of beads. [*Figs. 3.216, 3.217, 3.218, 3.219, 3.220*] The constriction almost invariably, at least

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[283] See other examples in Bautze, J. K.: 1995: p. 34, Pl. XXII a and b, and further references thereof.

[284] In particular the examples preserved in the Vidisha, Bhopal and Gwalior museums, and of course also with the bun of the Didarganj figure in the Patna Museum.

when viewed frontally, has a small rosette tucked into its side. The large mushroom like fillet is seen better in examples where the figure is shown in three-quarter profile. Ladies with this hairstyle are usually reserved for a specific iconographic formula, where they are closely associated with large lotuses or any other almost fantastic floral vine that dominates the entire background of the plaque.[286] Often these ladies have another ornament over their ears shaped like a graduated and tiered cone, perhaps inspired by a bud. Although similar in its general hairstyle, [*Fig. 3.218*] is unique in that the moulded plaque of the lady has been cut away from its background and placed on a pedestal, achieving the effect of a sculpture in the round despite the use of a two-dimensional relief.

This technique can be seen in other plaques as well such as in [*Fig. 3.221*]. Although it is similar to images of ladies with weapons in the hair, the delicately fashioned weapons would have been too fragile to leave on a free standing piece cut away from the supporting background. The desire to make three-dimensional forms was expressed through a second technique as well, where moulded parts were attached to a modelled body. This technique was first seen in the late Mauryan period, in the second century BC, particularly at sites like Pataliputra. [Compare: *Fig. 3.175 and 3.176*] In Bengal such pieces are said to come from Chandraketugarh, and are dated on stylistic grounds from about the late first century BC to the end of the first century AD. [*Figs. 3.222, 3.223, 3.224 a and b*] The form and style of the figures is akin to the types seen in the plaques, however the images are much larger (on average about 30 cm high) and both executed and conceived in the round. Like the earlier 'Mauryan' figures, their faces and jewellery are made from moulds, but the specific style of both are part of the vocabulary of post-Mauryan art, showing the greater adaptability and openness to experiment of the Bengali artists. Furthermore, the twists in the torso, outstretched arms and tilted heads show that the artists have fully transcended the limitations of two-dimensional reliefs, (even those where the reliefs were cut out of the background

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[285] Chakrabarti, et al: 1995, see also Eskenazi catalogue 1999. A similar stone piece is also in the collection of Peter Marks, New York.

[286] Four pieces of a large plaque with this iconography are preserved in the collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta (Accession No. 90/385 a, b, c and d). The plaque is from Chandraketugarh, and when complete would have measured almost 1½ feet in height. The flowers in the background are always

plaque) by imbuing movement in the figures. Only one fragmentary image of this style has been found in the Middle Gangetic Valley, which lies in the Patna Museum, and has been discussed earlier.

MALE FIGURES

The technique of making three-dimensional sculptures extended to the production of **Male figures** as well [*Fig. 3.225*]. As with the rest of the Subcontinent, representation of males continue to be significantly lower than female images. On the whole, they are generally less adorned than their female counterparts and the stippled decoration of their jewellery is less bold. However, in a few cases the men can wear exactly the same jewellery as the female figures (including one decorated bolster shaped earring, torques, necklaces, armbands and even girdles and anklets), executed with the same dexterous precision. Unlike the women, the male figures usually wear a limited repertoire of turbans (not shared with the women), and at times may leave their genitalia exposed. With fragmentary pieces however, these pointers are not always effective, and it can at times be difficult to distinguish between male and female figures.

The most common type of turban is the same one seen at Kaushambi, Mathura and other sites, where a circular projection with a central fold is positioned just off centre, on top of the head. [*Fig. 3.226*] in the collection of the ASI is one of the more plain plaques excavated from Tamluk and illustrates the variety of styles found there. The figures can, as in this case, also hold indistinguishable objects and have a small purse or end of a sash suspended from their girdles on to either thigh (usually left).

As mentioned above, the excessive jewellery in [*Fig. 3.227*] can at first be misunderstood to belong to a female figure. A similar confusion is particularly seen in the case of winged figures,

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stippled, as is the custom in this region. See also Bautze, J. K.: 1995: Pl. XVIII-a, XIX and XX-a for similar plaques.

who are usually more decorated than others.[287] The figure wears a typical turban with two central batons, usually reserved for princely children and young men. He is seen standing beside a small spotted cheetah or leopard.

A fascinating plaque from Lower Bengal dateable between the first century BC and first century AD in a private collection shows a large male figure almost lunging forward, with an upraised right arm, the left drawn close to his chest with his palm facing the viewer in an *abhaya mudra,* a twist in his hips and pronounced bend at his right knee. [*Fig. 3.228*] The figure wears a *dhoti*, large chunky bracelets, a short necklace with pendant rows of beads, very large discs in his ears and a crescent shaped object on his head. A typically attired female figure stands beside him not in an attitude of supplication, but with an arm reaching to his thigh and another behind him. It is therefore unlikely that she is an attendant, and is probably a partner or consort. At the bottom right corner of the plaque is a small diminutive female with an almost grimacing face, holding up a vertical object – she clearly is of a lower status, and is in attendance to the large male. The crescent on his head may be an allusion to the moon, the presence of a consort, and his *abhaya* gesture taken together can allow us to speculate whether this is an early representation of the god Shiva.

Similarly, another plaque stylistically attributable to the same region and period shows a figure riding what appears to be horse and carrying a trident [*Fig. 3.229*] which is usually an attribute associated with Shiva. However, the presence of a horse is unknown in later Shaivite iconography. These images highlight the all too common problems that confront art-historians in determining the identity of post-Mauryan images: Certain iconographic attributes and qualities are consciously deployed by the artist to convey a meaning intelligible to the later language of Indian religious imagery, yet the specific combination of elements from that vocabulary is not what the subsequent tradition has come to expect.

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[287] The different views of art-historians on whether the same image of a winged male figure is actually 'male', 'female' or consciously of 'indeterminate sex' have been outlined in Auboyer, J.: 1981. However, Auboyer's view that men did not wear anklets until the 8th century is untenable, as demonstrated by the example illustrated here.

The same is true in the case of numerous other Indian gods. In [*Fig. 3.230*] a chariot drawn by four caparisoned horses carries (as far as we can tell) at least one male figure. Could this be a representation of Sūrya? The horse drawn chariot is a motif already encountered at sites in the Upper and Middle Gangetic Valleys. Admittedly, the famous stone relief at Bodh-Gaya [*Fig. 3.309*] of broadly the same period has been generally regarded as one of the earliest representations of Sūrya, and it is therefore likely that Sūrya featured quite prominently in the visually expressed Indian pantheon. However, as in the case of most 'proto established-iconographies' it is natural to see a greater amount of inconsistency with the subsequent canon. Whereas Sūrya and many other divinities underwent a determinative change and synthesis with the influx of Iranian, Scythian, Parthian and Kuṣāna influences in the late first century AD; in the terracotta art of the post-Mauryan period we witness a pre-existing tradition already in a state of flux, and consequently that much more receptive to subsequent influences.

The changes of the late first century AD were not limited to stone alone: in [*Fig. 3.231*] of the late second to third centuries AD we see a moulded terracotta plaque from an unrecorded find-spot with two suspension holes showing a clearly recognisable Sūrya riding his chariot. Interestingly, the tradition of moulded plaques and the style of the figure (in particular his turban) which betray vestiges of the post-Mauryan idiom are seen combined with a Central Asian armour and a style of rearing-horses popular after the Kuṣānas.

As far as the **winged figures** are concerned, scholarship is divided on whether they are to be identified with Sūrya, Skanda-Kārtikeya, Kāma (the god of love) or other celestial beings like Garuda, Kinnaras, Gandharvas, Suparnas and Apsaras.[288] As yet, no one plaque has been found which can be identified with any assurance. There also seems to be no reason to believe

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[288] See for instance the contrary views of Auboyer, J.: 1981; Kala, S. C.: 1980: pp. 32-34; Kala, S.C.: 1974: pp. 259-63; K. Deva and V. Mishra: 1961: p. 51; Dhavalikar: 1977: p. 54. That some of the winged figures were semi-divine celestial beings garlanding or proclaiming the greater status of another figure is commonly seen in contemporary stone reliefs from Sanchi and other Buddhist sites. This can be found in terracotta as well, as in the case of the enshrined goddess in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, discussed above. See also Mandal, P. K.: 1987: Pl. 8, p. 27 where a winged *Gandharva* and a double headed eagle (similar to the one at the Jaulian stupa, Taxila) were probably associated with another divine figure.

that all the winged figures represent the same divinity. The maximum number of such figures has been found in Lower Bengal. These are also the most detailed, in keeping with the general style of the region. The four plaques illustrated here are the most common types found in the region. In all of them care has been taken to decorate the wings. They also show the most popular styles of turbans found in the region, viz. with two prongs [*Fig. 3.232*] (in a private collection), a coiled central bun (in the piece from the Tamluk Museum) [*Fig. 3.233*] and a large lateral projection in [*Fig. 3.234*] in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum.

As previously mentioned, male figures are generally seen in an attitude where they either express their strength and valour (fighting winged lions, riding chariots or elephants, etc.) or in situations where their superior status is underscored through symbols of temporal authority (*cauris, chhatras*). In [*Fig. 3.235-a*] in the style of Chandraketugarh, these attributes are brought together. Only the right side of the plaque is preserved and shows a princely male figure surrounded by five female figures. They are all exquisitely adorned, each wearing a different type of headdress. The principal figure stands beneath a large parasol and possibly on a chariot, indicated by the fragmentary curving wall in front of him. One of the figures holds a *cauri.* The female attendants are akin to the figures of dancers seen earlier. Headdresses like those of the lady wearing a jewelled cap with tassels falling on her forehead or the rectangular space demarcated on their foreheads by combing the hair around it, or leaving the hair open and uncovered, can be compared with several pieces from the period across the India. [*Fig. 3.235-b*] (Compare [*Fig. 3.236*] excavated from Tamluk, in the collection of the ASI, Delhi, [Fig. 3.237] in the collection of the Tamluk Museum and [*Fig. 3.238*] in the Kanoria collection.)

Although animal figures have been largely left out of this study, images where humans are found associated with them have been discussed. As with other regions, a consistently found formula of several (usually three) **figures riding an elephant** is seen. In a piece from Hadipur, Chandraketugarh, [*Fig. 3.239*] in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, one of two figures seated on an elephant carries a pot, reminding us of a similar piece mentioned earlier. If Buddhist subjects impressed upon the artisans working

in terracotta, then this can be regarded as a scene which shows the dispersal of the Buddha's relics – a theme familiar in contemporary stone imagery. Other notable plaques that show figures riding an elephant include two fragments from Tamluk. [*Fig. 3.240*] was excavated at the site, and is in the collection of the ASI, Delhi and [*Fig. 3.241*] at the Tamluk Museum. In all these pieces, the elephants have been modelled with sensitivity, the leathery nature of their hide, special jewellery, and volume is rendered with care. It is unlikely that all the plaques with elephant riders depict the same theme. In the case of some of the Upper-Gangetic Valley examples a figure was seen dropping coins behind the elephant, and this was interpreted as a scene showing the narrative of *Udayana-Vāsavdattā*. Sometimes, the regal status of the rider is highlighted by an attendant carrying a *dhvaja*, or flag, a symbol rarely seen represented in art, but referred to in literary sources and inscriptions alike [*Fig. 3.242*].

'NARRATIVE' SCENES

One of the greatest qualities associated largely with the artists of Bengal is the portrayal of **genre scenes** of ritual processions and village scenes. These involve not the prominent divine figures but simply dressed characters engaged in music and dance, at times marching before caparisoned elephants, or villagers at work outside their huts [*Fig. 3.243*]. In one such narrative fragment in the Kanoria collection [*Fig. 3.244*] two men carry bundles of sugar cane, perhaps for the specially adorned elephant behind them, while the joyful faces of men and women can be seen in the corner of the plaque. An almost identical piece in ivory from a private collection is better preserved. [*Fig. 3.245*] Although the large numbers of contemporary ivory figures from Bengal have never been seriously studied, they were compared and collated for the present work, unfortunately due to the limitations of this study they cannot be discussed here. They are closely related to the terracotta images in both style and iconography.

Of all the available scenes of ritual festivity, a rare document perhaps preserving the nature of early Indian **masked dances**, can be seen in a set of five fragmentary plaques. They are all probably impressions from the same mould, and preserve different parts of the whole composition. The first of these to came to light in a private collection [*Fig. 3.246*], and shows

two figures with elephant heads on the right side of a plaque playing musical instruments. The upper one strums an ornate bow harp, which ends in a finial shaped like a bird's head and the lower figure pats a drum. Although the temptation to label the image as a proto-Ganeśa is strong, the division of the iconographic quality of an elephant head on a human body between two, discounts such speculation. Ganeśa is also recognised through his pot-belly whereas these figures are thin. The acquisition in 1997 of another similar plaque by the Ashmolean Museum [*Fig.3.247*] did not help determine what the nature of the scene was either. It preserves the same side of the plaque as the previous piece, and is even more fragmentary. However, it began to highlight the possible importance of his scene. Soon after, a few more pieces came to light, two of them are illustrated here. [*Fig. 3.248*] gradually began to complete the jigsaw, it shows the same upper harp-playing figure and preserves a small part of the scene to its left, missing in the previous two examples. Surprisingly, a third elephant headed figure makes an appearance, clapping his hands and marking time while his trunk is wrapped around the head of a dancing male. The fourth piece [*Fig. 3.249*] shows the top left corner of the plaque, where the dancing elephant and man are next to another spirited dancer with arms raised in the air, standing before a building with arches. No complete piece or fragment of the lower left corner of the narrative has yet come to light. The last piece, related to this group, was excavated at Chandraketugarh and is housed in the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.[289] A group of four figures are compacted into a small fragment only six cm. high. At least two of them wear elephant headed masks, a third figure also wears a zoomorphic headdress while a lady looks on. Two of the figures play musical instruments and one rides a spotted deer. The wearing of masks in ritual performances associated with revelry, music and dance, processions with caparisoned animals clearly formed an integral part of the cultural fabric of the people. There are several textual and plastic references to this, which have all sadly, been marginalised by scholarship in favour of the more philosophical strains in Indic religious discourse. These issues are dealt with at greater length in the following chapter.

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[289] See Biswas, SS: 1981: pl. XL (b).

Relatively simpler compositions, like the ones in the Upper-Gangetic Valley, of a male playing a bow harp or clapping next to a dancing female are more common. Unlike their northern parallels however, these pieces are characterised by the local styles of costume and jewellery, almost always more detailed than the ones from other parts of the country.[290] At times these figures can be enshrined, as in [*Fig. 3.250*] where the figures perform on either side of a tree (trees have a well-established spiritual significance, known most commonly through their association with *Yakṣīs* and with the Buddha). They are flanked on the extremities of the plaque by two free-standing pillars on which peacocks are perched, their plumage falling along the length of the pillar. Traces of the stepped merlons that often cap the roofs of such shrines are almost eroded, and there is a curious inclusion of an animal at the foot of the tree.

MITHUNA AND MAITHUNA

Images of 'couples' associated with musical instruments can at times be rendered in a manner that is more stiff, where they are akin to donor or *mithuna* pairs. *Mithuna* and *maithuna* scenes are found with unparalleled frequency and variety in these parts, and within them, some of them are compositionally and iconographically consistent – giving credence to the idea that they are not merely 'secular' representations. Some of the more interesting ones are discussed below.

Mithuna, referring to loving couples (as opposed to *maithuna*, where a couple or an orgiastic group is found actively engaged in sex) can usually be seen with a male and female embracing. In [*Fig. 3.251*] the male places one hand under his partner's chin, the other around her shoulder pulling her close to him. The flowers in the background are a common decorative device, symbolic perhaps of their blossoming love. The theme of a couple seated on a chair can be seen in Bengal as well. A compositional feature rarely seen in other parts of the country, is the visualisation of the female from the back.[291] Rendered with remarkable movement and dexterity, [*Fig. 3.252*] in a private collection shows a woman seated in her

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[290] Compare, for instance, a plaque in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, (1987.142.376), published in Poster, Amy: 186: p. 105, No. 36; Sotheby's Catalogue: April 18, 1983: Lot 114; Lerner and Kossak: 1991:p. 56, No. 13.

partner's lap with her arms around him, reaching up to kiss him as he lovingly holds her face. The figures are seated on a chair, the man's legs supported on a footstool. Large lotus blossoms are to be found behind his chair and small rosaces fill the rest of the background. A bird sits beside the footstool.

One of the most artistically accomplished plaques is in the collection of the Ashmolean, Oxford. [*Fig. 3.253*] It shows a young embracing couple, the male on his partner's left, reaching to her face, as she turns her embarrassed glance away from him. The composition lends her the contradictory feelings of shyness on the one hand and closeness of embrace on the other. This sort of tenderness, individuality and expression of mood is exceptional, and when present, largely limited to Lower Bengali pieces. The creamy clay is also diagnostic of the same region.

The same sort of tenderness can be seen in another piece collected off the surface at Tamluk, now in the local museum, where two embracing and kissing figures stand behind a wall outside a house. [*Fig. 3.254*] Artistically, the piece is unlike any other, and reveals a completely different compositional idiom. The view is largely aerial and the artist is as much concerned with the context as he is with the figures themselves. Furthermore, the context is not of a the shrines and pillars that we have come to expect from these plaques, but a wholly different, charming, everyday one – allowing a glimpse into aspects of Early India invariably hidden.

At the same time, *mithunas* can be found in the more standard architectural contexts of shrines with *Caitya* arches, and elaborate pillars with addorsed animal capitals supporting wooden roofs of repeating pyramidal or stepped merlon shapes – that are hardly different from those reserved for the heraldic goddesses with weapons. They can also, as in [*Fig. 3.255*] have attendants. The most spectacular of all the large plaques representing *mithuna*

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[291] For another piece see, Bautze, J. K.: 1995: pl. XXX

scenes is one in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.[292] [*Fig. 3.256*] The large couple dominate the composition where a seated male stretches his left arm to reach for his partner standing in front him, while his other hand held close to his chest is closed with one raised finger, a gesture seen also in [*Fig. 3.252*] discussed above. His feet touch his partner's right leg, who has one hand placed on his thigh and the other raised to her headdress. A boy wearing a thickly pleated robe is seated in the foreground, holding on to a chained and howling dog. Two ducks sit in the lower left corner and a reptilian animal climbs up towards the male on the opposite side of the plaque. The principal protagonists both wear elaborate turbans, the male's with a pronounced conical projection and the lady's in an complicated wrap-and-fold that rises towards the left. She also wears a jewelled *tīkā* (or forehead ornament) suspended by a thick twisted chord that goes over her head and a separate long coiled horn-like element falling to the right. The latter has beaded strings suspended along its length. Both the male and female figure's headdresses are found in other pieces from Lower Bengal (compare [*Figs. 3.257, 3.258*]). The image of the seated boy too is not without precedent, an identical figure, also holding a chain (although in slightly poorer condition, removed from his context and lacking the delicacy of the Metropolitan example) is in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta [*Fig. 3.259*]. The scene is set in an architectural context, where the vertical ends of pairs of rafters are visible in the roof supported by pillars (rising from *ghatas* or pots) that serve to frame the composition. Interestingly, the reptile's tail, duck, flower tucked into the man's turban and the lady's headgear all break the margin provided by the architectural frame, investing the scene with movement and the idea of further space. Visually, the plaque also creates compositional engagement and a complex interplay of light and shade by contrasting heavily ornamented and detailed portions like the figures' jewellery and fabric with the clean and relieving space of the background and smooth modelling of their bodies. Two suspension holes are drilled into the top corners of the plaque.

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[292] The piece was found in eight pieces and has been restored. It has also been tested for authenticity through thermoluminescence on March 13, 1992 at the Archaeological Laboratories at Oxford, which showed that the piece was fired between 1400 – 2200 years ago.

Importantly, no *maithuna* scene has been found of the same quality or size. They are always of a small size, seldom more than the size of a palm, and even more rarely with suspension holes. Their function remains mysterious. The most detailed and plausible explanation for them has bee given by Desai who feels they may show the transmutation in visual media of fertility rituals.[293] *Maithuna*, as noted above, is the iconographic term for scenes which show figures in active sexual congress. They can involve more than two figures representing coition, cunnilingus, fellatio and perhaps even sodomy. They are more popular in Lower Bengal (particularly in the Chandraketugarh region) than in any other part. A few have also been found at Tamluk and Kaushambi.

The greatest number of *maithuna* scenes show the female lying on her back with her legs splayed and knees raised (at times held up by her hands). [*Figs. 3.260, 3.261, 3.262*] By contrast the male who penetrates her is shown standing. He can also be seen either fondling his partner's breast or at times holding up her raised leg. The women are usually smiling and lying on a low, deep chair. In the more detailed pieces, the figures are set inside a room: the interior space indicated through the furniture, framing pillars, roof and the inclusion of household wares like pots, pans and trays. The latter accoutrements are always placed on the ground, and usually below the bed. The most vivid portrayal of these is in a piece in the Kanoria collection [*Fig. 3.263*].

Other groups of *maithunas* may be made, once again, on the basis of the position of the figures. In figures [*3.264, 3.265, 3.266*] the lady faces in the same direction as her partner who enters her from behind. One of these pieces, in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, was found at Chandraketugarh. [*Fig. 3.267*] It shows the male figure in a conical cap, generally known to be worn by Central Asians. An unusual coital scene that shows a man lying on a reclining chair with his partner straddled on top of him [*Fig. 3.268*] was excavated at Tamluk, and is in the collection of the ASI, Delhi. Various flowers, mostly lilies and rosettes are littered in the background. A textile with rounded edge is placed

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[293] Desai, D.: 1975: pp. 14 – 18, and in Poster, A. : 1986: pp. 35 – 36.

over the chair supported on curved legs. A close look shows that although the female faces her partner, her body is in fact twisted and is in the same direction as the man. In most *maithuna* scenes such as this, there seems to be a deliberate attempt on the part of the artist to clearly show the intercourse and not merely allude to it. After all, *displaying* the act, was the principal focus while fashioning these plaques.

At least four similar scenes of an orgiastic group involving six to eight figures are known.[294] [*Fig. 3.269*] Crammed with entwined figures it is difficult to tell what is happening. Reading the scene is confused further by the presence of the suspension hole at the bottom centre. Four female figures sit at the corners, the lower ones have their legs splayed. The central scene shows the rear view of a female straddling her partner, hidden behind her. (In a position similar to [*Fig. 3.270*].)

Demonic (*yakṣa*-like?) figures can also be seen in *mithuna* and *maithuna* scenes, however, in the latter case they are usually with a partner who has a female body and the head of a ram. They have severe, grimacing and wrinkled faces, wide jaws usually displaying their teeth and pointed ears. They are also invariably dwarves and pot-bellied. Similar in conception to the famous Kaushambi plaque where a lady was being carried away by a demonic figure, is a small plaque from Bengal in the Kanoria collection. However, it possess neither the finesse or sensitivity of the Kaushambi example. Sometimes, the pot-bellied figure is seen in his more conventional role as an atlas, carrying the female on his shoulders [*Fig. 3.271*]. In the more sexually explicit scenes, as mentioned above, their partner usually changes and becomes one with a ram's head, seen in a pieces from Chandraketugarh, one of which is illustrated here [*Fig. 3.272*].

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[294] For an identical piece excavated from Chandraketugarh in the Asutosh Museum, see Biswas, SS: 1981: Pl XLII a. There is a piece with a similar theme in the collection of the V&A, London, (IS 7-1978) purchased from Ulrich von Schroeder. His entry in the supporting papers (Registered Papers No. 77/2176) suggest that this plaque represents the sophisticated life of Indian courtesans, and shows a "coiffured female being shaved by a kneeling man" (!). Clearly, with the number of figures in the piece and its eroded condition, it is difficult to tell what exactly is happening. However, to see the "shaving" requires considerable imagination! Another similar, but equally denuded piece is in the Kanoria collection.

Scenes of fellatio are generally all of one type. Few intact pieces survive, and they are all weathered. Three different ones have been selected here, so that by comparing them, a clearer picture may be developed. [*Figs. 3.273, 3.274, 3.275*] The plaque is usually lozenge shaped, the pointed ends forming their vertical axis. The tight composition shows a bending ithyphallic man faced by a crouching female, her hair raised into a high bun. In the better-preserved examples, deep folds of flesh are rendered below her breasts accentuating the curvature of her pose. She can also be seen to titillate her genitalia with an object held in her hand.

Finally, a piece showing a squatting female with a long vegetal object in her vagina needs to be considered. [*Fig. 3.276*] Several such images have been found, and they show the woman with a swollen belly in the act of giving birth. She is quite literally the goddess of productivity and vegetal fertility. In a recent and entirely plausible study of these images, Roy Chowdhury[295] has compared them with the images often called 'Lajjā-Gauri'[296] or 'Aditi' (as Kramrisch named her[297]). By relating her to these goddesses, seldom seen in Indian art after the seventh century AD, she has also been able to use a paradigm that allows one to seek continuities from localised interpretations of divinities represented in the terracotta with subsequent imagery. Such an interpretation perhaps also allows us to read the ritualised significance, reception and intention behind the other more overtly sexual sculptures as expressing the complex nature of fertility symbolism in popular early Indic faiths.

Toy-Carts, Pots, Rattles and Miscellaneous Pieces

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[295] Roy Chowdhury, S.: 1999: pp. 293 – 296. In another article, 1995-96: fig. 26, p. 103, she illustrates a malthuna from Chandraketugarh in the collection of West Bengal Archaeology in which the female has a lotus head instead of an anthropomorphic one, making her similar to the iconographic type familiar to *Lajja Gauri*. Also see Desai, D.: 1975: Pl. 9, p. 15.

[296] Bolon, C.R.: 1992, and a detailed study and categorisation through the history of this iconographic type thereof.

[297] Kramrisch, S.: 1956: pp. 259 – 70.

Toy carts are mostly double-moulded and [unlike the rattles which are hollow, these are] solid. The front of the images is rendered with greater care than the back. They usually have a tubular hole at the base of the sculpture meant for an axle on either side of which terracotta wheels would have been attached. Another hole in the sculpture's back served as a socket that could either be attached to another cart or chariot with a tenon or, more commonly, have a stick inserted into it to allow the toy to be pushed forward by a child. The former are similar to carts seen at Kaushambi and other sites, where a series of moulds are used to make individual walls that are stuck together to make a cart. It is more likely however, that most of the solid double-moulded cart fronts representing mythical scenes and animals were pushed along by a stick. [*Fig. 3.277*] from the Chandraketugarh area shows a boy using his toy in this manner. The carts have been found from a wide variety of sites across India, and we have already discussed some of them earlier. The only major difference may be the presence of greater numbers of human and other anthropomorphic imagery in the toy carts from Bengal.

The toy cart fronts can be in a wide variety of shapes and forms. The most common are either single birds / animals or, more complex ones with humans seated on animals or atlases (*guhyakas / naras*?). A third group includes pot-bellied figures with demonic features. Included in the first group are the large numbers of elephant heads preserved in the Asutosh Museum[298], State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta,[299] the Kanoria collection [*Figs. 3.278 and 3.279*], and several other private collections in India and abroad.[300] The whole piece shows just the face of a bull elephant (the tusks are often visible) with his trunk swaying to the right, at times holding up some foliage with it. The elephant is winged and has typically large ears. Sometimes, a female figure can be seen standing next to him. The elephants are decorated with garlands and bands. As both Bautze[301] and Narain[302] have said, the previous identification of these images with Ganesh is not based on any decisive evidence.

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[298] Dhavalikar, M.K.: 1977: Pl. 68A (Asutosh Museum No. 26442)

[299] Biswas, S.S.: 1981: Pl. Xa.

[300] For a list of some of these, see Bautze, J.K.: 1989: p. 124

[301] Bautze, J. K. : 1989: 124

Other interesting pieces include those shaped like a peacock [*Figs. 3.280*] and owl [*Figs. 3.281*] from Chandraketugarh in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, and others of animals like the *makara* [*Fig. 3.282*], or ram, horse and bull.

An important piece considered by Sivaramamurti[303] and others[304] to be an early representation of Shiva as *Vinādhara Dakṣināmūrti* shows a typically attired post-Mauryan male figure holding a bow harp supported by two atlases. [*Figs. 3.283*] Bautze has suggested an iconographic ascription of Kubera for the same piece by interpreting the bow harp as a moneybag.[305] While proving either hypothesis is difficult, it is likely that the image is related to the world of *Yakṣas*. *Yakṣas* and *Yakṣis* are known to be perhaps the most dominant and popular divinities of Early India. Frequently associated with the world of sprites and demons on the one hand, water cosmogony and beauty on the other, the rituals surrounding them frequently involved propitiation through music, dance and offerings. At the same time, throughout the history of art, temporal authority has always relied on spiritually charged metaphors for their own benefit. Notions of the *chakravartin* are, in this early period, known to have both conditioned and been influenced by, religious metaphors. To that extent, this may well be the representation of an important personage.

Another type of toy cart found in Bengal shows a demonic pot-bellied figure with bulging eyes, a furrowed and large face with an open jaw eating a reptile of some sort.[306] [*Figs. 3.284*] In some other examples, the figure can be seen holding an owl or a snake – all fearful animals usually associated with night, death and consequently regeneration.

Of the carts that might have been attached to these figures, only one has been illustrated here as a representative example. [*Figs. 3.285 a and b*] It shows two winged deer charging towards

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[302] Narain, A.K: 1986.

[303] Sivaramamurti, C.: 1977: p.77

[304] Ghosh, A.: 1977: pp. 40-41.

[305] Bautze, J. K.: 1995: p. 25, Pl. XXXIXb.

[306] A group of these has been discussed by Bautze, J. K.: 1989: p. 125

the centre of the curved front wall. Many other types are known, such as those with rearing horses (at times with a figure seated on top, in which case we can speculate whether it might be a Sūrya), rams or bulls- expressing the same variety seen in the Upper-Gangetic Valley.

The hollow double moulded rattles are of two types. The ones of animals like horses and elephants tend to be slightly later productions (post first century AD), while some of the squatting pot-bellied figures are known from the first century BC on. The latter can be both, ferocious, [*Fig. 3.286*] like the toy carts mentioned above, with all the same iconographic attributes of snakes, reptiles and owls held by figures with grimacing expressions; and those with gentle and pleasant expressions. [*Figs. 3.287*] is of the latter type, and was discovered at Chandraketugarh. The *Yakṣa* is heavily bejewelled, his left hand resting on his knee, and the other holding a fruit. In order to prevent the pieces shattering during firing, a small hole is left in them to allow the expanding hot air to escape. In the few complete pieces that have been found, a small clay pellet is left loose in the piece, and on account of the sound it makes, these pieces have been thought of as rattles.

A group of ceramic wares, utilitarian in form and profusely decorated in the style of the moulded plaques, have been found at Chandraketugarh and Tamluk. [*Figs. 3.288, 3.289 a and b, 3.290 and 3.291*] Pieces of this sort have not been recorded from other sites so far, but it is likely that they were made, or travelled at least within Southern Bengal, if not beyond. For the most part, the motifs represented on them seem to be religiously charged (images of the goddess with weapons, mithunas, mythical composite and winged animals, etc.). All the pots are wheel-thrown, and can be decorated through two techniques. The first is where leather-hard moulded plaques are affixed on to the surface of equally moist pots, and the second involves the more arduous process of throwing a pot with thick walls and carving the decoration on to it. In the second type, the pot would necessarily, have to be worked on over a longer duration. Stylistically however, both types are executed similarly, with the same detailed stippling and variety of motifs that we have come to associate with the best of Bengali plaques. Although it seems difficult to imagine that the larger pots are made without a mould,

a close examination of 22 such pieces showed no evidence of stamps or moulds.[307] Unfortunately, illustrations of scientifically authenticated pots using this latter technique could not be obtained in time for this present work. The pieces illustrated here are all made by joining moulded plaques to the pots. The two views of [*Figs. 3.289 and b*] show a scene of water, where a makara emerges from the mouth of another, and the legs of a figure are seen swimming away. Tiny rosettes and dots mark the whole background. On a sherd from Tamluk in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, [*Figs.3.288*] two small figures are seen in the midst of a scrolling lotus vine. The female emerges from a bloom, in much the same way as the one on the famous ['Late Mauryan'] stone disc from Rajghat does.[308] However, unlike her antecedents, she has one arm around her *Yakṣa* (?) partner who is of the class of grotesque pot-bellied figures with pointed ears. Supernatural symbolism is also evident in the sherd where another figure stands on top of a large lotus bloom, flanked by a winged horse. [*Fig. 3.291*] The last illustrated example, is extensively restored, [*Fig. 3.290*] and only part of the decorative plaque is preserved. The pot itself is shaped like a globular jar with a cylindrical neck and a pronounced collared lip.[309] Traces of the decorative plaque showing rearing *vyāla*-like winged horses and composite *makara* – elephants also emerging from lotuses survive on a band affixed on its shoulder and on the lip. Clearly, these pots were used for ritual purposes, associated with the paraphernalia that would have accompanied the worship of the varied Early-Historic pantheon. Plain, undecorated utilitarian wares are not in short supply in these regions, and those, unlike the specially decorated wares, would have satisfied the everyday needs of the people. Besides, the preponderance of supernatural motifs closely related to *yakṣa* and water cosmogony invests these pieces with special significance.

The nature of the shrines where these wares would have been used is evident from the large plaques of goddesses who stand in an enclosed architectural space. Many of these plaques

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[307] These are divided between several private collectors and dealers.

[308] Gupta, S.P.: 1980: Pl. 29a. The image has been discussed in Chapter 2.

have been discussed above [*Figs 3.188, 3.189, 3.255 etc.*]. Unlike the Upper-Gangetic Valley where there were greater numbers of shrines that enclosed sacred tanks behind *vedikas*, here at least two separate architectural orders are seen fused. The many *Caitya* arches that find their immediate predecessor in the famous Barabar cave dated to the Late Mauryan period come from a pre-existing Indian tradition of making barrel vaulted wooden roofs supported by beams.[310] Seemingly arcuate, the arches are in fact seen supported by pillars and rafters. These have been faithfully continued and represented in the stone and terracotta imagery of post-Mauryan times (refer also to *Fig. 3.292* from Tamluk).

The second ranks amongst the earliest references to trabeate construction in India, ideas that were to endure and develop into the most celebrated orders of Indian architecture. Flat roofed structures are seen constructed in the simple post-and-lintel format. The pillars themselves often have bell shaped capitals and crowning addorsed animals. (In addition to the more complete plaques discussed above, see the following fragment *3.293 a* and its detail *3.293 b*) The earliest reference to these too was in the Mauryan period. The capitals undoubtedly relate to shallow wooden prototypes, however we must recall from where the form of those derives. The elaborate forms of the stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi, broadly contemporary with the terracotta discussed here and with which they share a number of motifs, could not have been born fully-fledged. They obviously had a long antecedent history in perishable media, particularly in wood. And in that antecedent period, it is also clear, they must have been open to a wide range of successive waves of artistic influences. Unfortunately since almost none of this antecedent material survives in any quantity, we are not able to trace a neat continuum, or trace with any accuracy the progression of the architectural vocabulary of Central and Eastern India. What we do have, are largely imperial Mauryan prototypes and these too are the subject of much academic debate. All we need acknowledge at this point is that in the Mauryan pillars we have already seen a sophisticated digestion of artistic elements of disparate parentage brought to bear on an essentially archaic Subcontinental cult of free-

[309] A report on the thermoluminescence tests on this piece showed it was fired between 2520 (+/- 500) years ago. The test was conducted by VJ Bortolot at the Daybreak Archaeometric Laboratory, USA in Sept. 1995.

standing-pillar / totem worship. In time, these pillars become still more Indianised, seen progressively through to their translation into *dhvaja-sthambha* (free standing pillars usually in later temple enclosures). In the immediate post-Mauryan period however, architectural motifs continue to owe some features to Graeco-Persian art,[311] of which addorsed animal capitals like the ones mentioned above, and the stepped battlement pattern on the roofs are but one expression. Though their inspiration may be foreign, their form results in an attractive, Indian assimilation. (For instance, although the idea of addorsed lions may be common in West Asia, the commonly seen post-Mauryan addorsed bulls are not). Similarly, the motif of stepped battlements begins to lose its original function, and is stylised into a triangular motif. The potent symbol of the pillar itself however, was probably worshipped from pre-Mauryan times. Undoubtedly, it was influenced by a fresh wave of architectural motifs with growing international trade and contacts from the fourth century BC on. However, by the first century BC, these had been fully Indianised – given lotus capitals, bulls and *cakras* as crowning elements and seen to rise from *ghatas* or earthen pots. All these ideas are represented in the terracottas discussed here.

On the whole, in Bengali terracotta we are fortunate to see a rich and unparalleled variety of styles and iconographies that are remarkably well preserved. However, art-historical studies are frustrated by the appalling lack of textual and archaeological contextual information. Yet, the imagery itself, if looked at *en masse*, and in relation to its counterparts in terracotta, ivory and stone from both Bengal and the rest of the country, slowly begins to unfold its own language. On the one hand this is a language of symbol and motif lending consistency to the iconography. On the other, the plaques themselves offer valuable information on the nature of worship and the motivations behind it. Furthermore, in toy carts, narratives, utilitarian wares, we find into windows to peep into a more holistic cultural fabric of popular Ancient India, otherwise only surmised through Buddhist eyes.

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[310] That these architectural forms had a long history in India has been proved several times. See for instance, Gupta, S. P.: 1980: pp. 195 – 205, 211 – 221.

[311] For a more recent evaluation of these motifs see Boardman, J.: 1994: fn. 85-88, p.331 and pp.110-112.

The pieces are marked by tremendous iconographic and compositional variety executed in a distinctly detailed style. Clays in the region tend to be cream in colour while the rest of the country used a greater amount of red and grey clay. The objects are seldom fired to vitrification and are consequently fragile. This is because the pale clay used by them needed a higher firing temperature than the more commonly used red and grey clays in other regions. The artisans were skilled in using a complex array of techniques that extended beyond the production of moulded plaques (viz. decorated pots, partly modelled and partly moulded figures in the round).

Unlike other parts of the country, the style of these images lasted approximately until the third century AD. Dating the pieces accurately within the broad period of their production remains fraught with controversy, however, they are part of a tradition initiated in the rest of the Subcontinent in the second century BC, and to that extent they should be considered along with those images. Other aspects of dating these images and the sites that they come from have been discussed above. At the same time, various other issues remain unresolved. A disproportionately greater number of pieces come from Southern Bengal, yet the sites there are relatively weak in pre-second century BC archaeology. In seeking antecedents to the development of not just the style of the terracotta imagery, but a wider urban culture that supported a large artisan community, one comes up with little conclusive, material evidence from Bengal itself, forcing one to look invariably at the sites in the Middle and Upper-Gangetic Valleys. Until more evidence is unearthed by the archaeologist's spade, and more technical petrographic analyses to see regional variations in inclusions in the clay are conducted, some of these issues will be hard to resolve.

VI. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS
STYLE, ICONOGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY

This chapter is only a first empirical examination of the post-Mauryan terracotta arts of India. Rather than be limited to one site or region, in studying them across the country, several themes were addressed in a more comprehensive manner. The styles of pieces have also been contextualised against the background of their antecedents, and in relation to each other in this period. Further, by including relatively securely dated pieces from excavations, a vast number of other artefacts could be dated and attributed to a region. It is hoped that some of the regional groupings that have been made may serve as a reference for further research, and to establish a provenance for the hoards of other pieces that lie scattered in both public and private collections.

However, while exposing this material, certain categories were made. They included five regional ones, and within each of them, objects were split according to their formal characteristics into male and female, toy carts, narrative scenes, etc. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, these categories were created for the sake of convenience. Objects found just south of Kaushambi, for instance, although still within the geographical limits of what is termed the 'Upper-Gangetic Valley' are also close to northern Bihar, and exhibit a style that can simultaneously show properties of both, the Upper and Middle-Gangetic Valleys. The same is true of many other sites that lie near the border of any geographical region. Secondly, sites like Mathura, Kaushambi, Sugh, Tamluk and Chandraketugarh were prodigious centres of terracotta art. They lay on busy trade routes, and were obviously quite populous. The assemblages of plaques from these sites are varied in iconography and style. As a result, while some features were found to be distinctive to a site, others were common to the region as a whole and still others, shared across a South Asian canvas. The more distinctive pieces from each of these regions have been discussed here along with some others that show close affinity with those from other sites in order to highlight this feature. Thirdly, objects were grouped according to the iconography that they exhibited. Once again, this division was based on empirical differences between images, that

does not necessarily imply that their original audience made the same divisions. For instance, we do not know if the icon of the goddess with ten weapons was very different from the one with five. The issue is made further complex when we see the goddess with five weapons in a *mithuna* or more narrative format. However, in spite of these precautions, some essential features of the nature of these images do become apparent. These conclusions are discussed below in three parts.

I.

There are a vast number of sites with innumerable pieces, they are simultaneously interconnected and differentiated. This is in terms of both iconography and style – the results of the study are summarised below.

Figurines with bird shaped heads, a single stump for legs and ritual tanks – (objects that are usually bracketed under headings like 'primitive' or 'timeless') – are commonly found at the more populous / larger sites in the Subcontinent. These sites invariably have a long antecedent history with a strong NBPW phase. Most of the sites are concentrated in the Northwest, Upper-Gangetic Valley and the Middle-Gangetic Valley. Although there are fewer objects of this sort from the Indo-Gangetic Divide and the Lower-Gangetic Valley, their mere presence in these parts at least provides some background to their prodigious expression in the subsequently popular moulded plaques. The same is true of the part-moulded-part-modelled images usually made between 300 – 200 BC.

The iconography of the **goddess with weapons** in her hair is common to the entire Subcontinent. Nearly identical at first glance, there are, in fact minor variations in the stylistic predilections of different regions. The pieces from Taxila and other Northwestern sites are closely related to the more plain types from the Divide (Sugh and Ropar) and Mathura. The weapons are usually small, the headgear and face of the figures large, and in their overall execution and drapery they are not as fine or detailed as the pieces from other regions along the Ganga. The pieces also tend to be small (the larger ones being about 15 cm.). At least

three bronze figurines with this iconography have been found in the environs of Bannu, west of the Indus.

Images from Sugh and Ropar in the Divide are generally detailed, crisper and fired at higher temperatures to shades of orange. Elaborate sprays of foliage interspersed with weapons top the goddesses' rounded faces. Stylistically, their closest parallels are in the finest material from the Upper-Gangetic Valley (Kaushambi and Mathura). It is also common to find the goddess touching one earring in this region.

Mathura and Kaushambi have the greatest variety within the broad iconographic group of goddesses with weapons in their hair. They are also the most prolific sites in the Upper-Gangetic Valley. Apart from being enshrined in a lotus tank, under parasols, flanked by *cauri* bearing and worshipful attendants, they can also be seen holding fans, fruit and in *mithuna* pairs. While the pieces from Mathura can be more coarse and generally smaller, further downstream (particularly around Kaushambi) the images are more detailed, situated in a variety of architectural contexts, surrounded by a number of other diminutive figures.

Although the Middle-Gangetic Valley is rich in Mauryan and Late Mauryan terracotta, the numbers of moulded terracotta are not as numerous as those of the Upper or Lower-Gangetic Valleys. Images of the goddess with weapons have been found at Tilaura-Kot, Vaishali and the Patna region. These are closely related to the style of Kaushambi. However, the other plaques from the region which show the ladies wearing turbans have their own distinct local style. The latter style is also more numerous in the Middle-Gangetic Valley than the custom of wearing weapons in the headgear.

The most elaborate plaques with this imagery come from the Lower-Gangetic Valley. Finely detailed, with tiny stipples decorating the surface, the goddess can be seen associated with birds, felines, standing on lotuses, pedestals, pots, showering coins, blessing her devotees and in a variety of architectural contexts. It is also not unusual to find the goddess with more or

less than five weapons in Bengal. Very similar figurines have been found in wood and ivory as well.

Enshrined Figures are found south and southeast of Mathura. These plaques are usually associated with *Lakṣmī* or *Gajalakṣmī* in the Upper-Gangetic Valley while other types of goddesses (usually the one with weapons) are enshrined in Bengal. The shrines too, become more elaborate in Bengal. The Upper-Gangetic Valley ones are usually in the nature of water tanks with lotus blossoms. A vedika surrounds the tank, and a set of steps is shown leading down to the water. In a few rare examples from Kaushambi, the figure can stand beneath an arch. In Bengal however, the shrines are architectural complexes with *Caitya* arches, elaborate pillars with bell shaped capitals, crowned by addorsed animals and pot-bellied atlases. At times the pillars can rise from pot shaped bases. Flat roofed shrines in Bengal usually carry pyramidal or stepped-battlement motifs on the ceilings.

Images of ***mithunas*** are to be found at most sites in the Subcontinent. The standard type is of a male and female couple standing in a rigid frontal posture next to each other. There is progressively more variety in the poses and a greater movement in the figures southeast of Mathura. Kaushambi and Southern Bengal also have a wide variety of ***maithuna*** plaques. These are almost always small in size (seldom larger than the palm of one's hand) and can show more than one couple in a single frame engaged in coital sex, bestiality or fellatio. The figures are invariably in interior scenes (barring a few examples from Tamluk) and a vessel is usually placed below their chair or bed.

No **winged figures** have been found north or northwest of Mathura so far. While winged male figures are known in a large number of poses (with weapons, peacocks and garlands) from the Upper-Gangetic Valley, winged females are more popular in the Middle and Lower-Gangetic Valleys.

Male figures are always less frequently found than female ones, although examples are known from every site in the country. Sites like Chandraketugarh and Kaushambi, which have

a generally richer heritage of moulded terracotta, have more examples of male figures than others. A strong common thread that binds the figures from disparate sites together is their generally common costume of an unfastened stitched coat, turban (usually with a projection to one side), *dhoti* and ornaments. Once again, south and southeast of Mathura, they can be found in a greater variety of poses, engaged mostly in activities which express their strength – riding chariots, fighting lions, wielding weapons like a bow and arrows or a spear- not symbolically in their hair, but in their arms.

The same general rules apply to images of **pot-bellied dwarf *yakṣas***, rattles, hollow and solid double-moulded figures and toy carts: Not unknown northwest of Mathura, but certainly with greater variety and more prolifically produced at Mathura and further southeast. Curiously, the Middle-Gangetic Valley is not as rich in its post-Mauryan terracotta as it was with Mauryan ones, nor is it as prodigious as its neighbouring Upper and Lower-Gangetic Valleys.

There are thus both overarching similarities across the Subcontinent and patterned differences as we move from the Northwest to the East. At the same time, some images or styles are peculiar to one site alone. For instance, images of the 'child-scribe' are so far only known from Sugh. Female figures with birds perched on their wrist or shoulder (usually parrots) are more popular towards the Middle-Gangetic Valley. There is a greater narrative element in the terracotta of Kaushambi and Southern Bengal where more figures are compacted into a small space, the postures and movements in the figures show exchange and interaction. Similarly, the famous toy cart with six seated figures on a journey with food and luggage is known only from Kaushambi and its neighbouring sites. The same is true for the famous, almost square *mithuna* plaque which shows a couple seated on a chair.

- Stylistically, the Northwest is, at least till about 50 – 60 AD influenced by centres like Mathura and the sites in the Divide, with which the region had extensive contacts. Gradually there was a greater interpenetration of Hellenistic forms in the region, but these too were variously interpreted. At times, even while the ornaments and clothing become

more influenced by Western Classical ideas, the form of the body and its function remain rooted in the pre-existing tradition.

- The Indo-Gangetic Valley, which has been a neglected area of study, has revealed some terracotta images crafted with exceptional skill. Related to important centres like Mathura on the one hand, and the Northwest on the other, this as a region that saw a relatively early assimilation of Indo-Greek influences.
- The Upper-Gangetic Valley has many important centres of terracotta art, and many of them have their own individual interpretations of the general styles that were in currency. Ayodhya had a predilection towards reduction fired dark grey images. A more 'Kuṣana' style in physiognomy, ornament and facial features can be seen in the female figures of Kannauj and Sankisa. The regions of Kaushambi and Mathura were the most important producers of terracotta plaques in the region. They exhibit an exceptionally wide range of styles and iconographies. While most plaques are made from a red clay fired to a high temperature, the hollow double-moulded ones carry traces of a white slip like their Bengali and later Sātvāhana counterparts. The Mathura and Ahichhatra regions with their neighbouring sites are also valuable in studying the progression of the styles of images as they were densely populated from pre-Mauryan times.
- In the Middle-Gangetic Valley, a close relationship is seen between the pieces found in Tilaura-Kot, Vaishali, Piprahwa, Sonpur and Patna. The last site however, with its three main mounds of Bulandibagh, Kumrahar and Pataliputra, was a larger urban centre with a long history. A progression of pieces from the earlier styles active in the Mauryan to the post-Mauryan ones is thus available here. The site was also a major centre of trade and open as a result, to greater influences in its figures from other regions both within the Subcontinent and from outside it. This can be seen in the large free-standing figures made using moulds and stamps to decorate modelled forms. The moulded plaques of the region are executed in the same style as the rest of the Subcontinent, however, there is a greater tendency towards representing ladies with turbans and birds, figures small weapons in their hair, mother and child types and winged figures.
- The Lower-Gangetic Valley witnessed the greatest efflorescence of moulded imagery that began around the same time as the rest of the Subcontinent however seems to have

lasted for a longer period here. The region is more prolific than any other and has revealed images that are made entirely from moulds, double-moulded, stamped and partially-moulded. Some of the more exceptional finds from the region include very large plaques: these can be entirely moulded or at times made using a combination of a variety of methods. While the red-clay objects from the region are as well fired as those from the rest of the Subcontinent, the commonly found pale grey and creamy clay plaques seem to have required still higher firing temperatures that were seldom reached. The style of the region is characterised by a general lyrical quality, a love for detailing and ornamentation. Again, the iconography of the pieces is exceptionally varied.

Sites and regions undoubtedly have their own expression, at the same time, they never break out of the general symbolic, artistic and technical grammar that is shared by the Subcontinent as a whole.

II.

For the most part, these images can be dated between the second century BC and the first century AD. Undoubtedly, the archaeology of the sites from where these pieces were found is not always without question, and dating the pieces from any one site in isolation is not likely to reveal any convincing results. However, we have correlated here the evidence from over 25 representative sites, some of them being the most scientifically excavated ones in the Subcontinent. While some of the conclusions of the excavators of Taxila, Kaushambi, Ropar and other sites are questionable, our purpose in this chapter was limited to dating the terracotta plaques alone. Combined with the information available in the previous chapter, these images show a progression from pre-existing material, yet are marked by several innovations. The study has nuanced what has been known so far about this material and introduced some complexities in dating the material.

The dating of the plaques as been largely dependant on the studies conducted by Coomaraswamy, Agrawala and Kramrisch more than 50 years ago. As per their chronology, the terracotta arts of ancient India can be divided into five categories. (1.) Primitive and pre –

Maurya up to about 400 BC, (2.) Late Pre – Maurya and Maurya *c.* 400 – 200 BC, (3.) Śunga, *c.* 200 BC – end of the era, (4.) Kuṣāna, 1 AD – AD 300, and 5. Gupta, AD 300 – 600.[312] These categories were watertight. Curiously though, they were established not so much on secure archaeology but on stylistic correspondences with stone sculptures. Further, an attempt to make the whole dating process more scientific was done through the almost simplistic progression in technique that was presented in a manner that made it seem that each period employed a distinct method of production. Crudely hand modelled and primitive imagery in the pre-Maurya phase, more carefully hand modelled figures with moulded faces from the Maurya period, relief plaques made entirely from moulds in the Śunga period, a resurgence of the hand modelled technique in the Kuṣāna and Gupta periods. These criteria formed the basis of dating Ancient Indian terracotta. While their conclusions remain largely correct, The study conducted in this Chapter and in Chapter 2 can modify and alter what was previously suggested.

Rather than alter the entire chronology, my concern here is limited to the category of what is called 'Śunga' and those images that should come into the bracket '*circa* second century BC to first century AD'. The first hurdle to be crossed was dating the material in conjunction with the dynastic reigns of the Mauryas and Śungas. This has already been discussed at several stages in the chapter, and needs no further elaboration here, except that we can see that the phrase 'Śunga' is very misleading. Since there are a number of dynasties, Śunga, Mitra, Datta, Kṣatrapa, Kanva, Sātvāhana, to name but a few, whose dates seem to overlap and who might have been contemporary, it is not correct to associate the terracotta from so broad a period with the name of one minor dynasty alone. (2.) Fully moulded plaques were made over a broad time span that began in the early years of the 2nd century BC and there does not seem to be any one clear cut-off date for them. Shallow-moulded plaques usually known as Śunga, were most popular between the 1st century BC – mid 1st century AD although traces of the style can be seen both earlier and later. The techniques of manufacturing and iconography of figures current in about 300 BC continue into much later periods. Many objects usually

[312] VS Agrawala, 1936, pp. 10 – 11.

considered diagnostic of the Mauryas were actually made over a broad time span that began in the pre-Maurya phase and continues well past Mauryan dates. However, from about 200 BC to 100 AD a wide range of several other forms and styles were introduced. These coexisted with and were formed with reference to their antecedents. (3.) The techniques employed between the second century BC and the first century AD included not just fully moulded two dimensional relief plaques, but crudely modelled 'timeless' pieces, images with moulded faces and modelled bodies, some fully modelled sculptures in the round and lastly both hollow and solid double-moulded figures which are often covered with a white slip. (4.) Our method of dating has been significantly buttressed by evidence from other sources previously unknown or little considered. Take for example the case of the stratigraphy at Sonkh, which has allowed us to contextualise a large part of the Mathura material as well. It appears now, that most of the pieces were not Śunga at all in that region, but made between the 1st century BC and the first half of the first century AD.

Similarly, although the archaeology of many of the sites studied here is fraught with controversies regarding the dating of their earliest settlements, there is little doubt regarding the nature of the assemblages from the early-Historic periods. There is also remarkable continuity and uniformity in the overall nature of material evidence from sites across the Subcontinent, even though their individual urban settlement patterns and building techniques may have varied. The objects are also found in conjunction with coins and specific types of pottery which can again, be dated to this period. And lastly, a factor that can not be understated, is the presence of a remarkable pattern of both related similarities and differences in the images themselves right across the board.

As already mentioned earlier, it is likely that the pieces from Bengal continued to be made into the third century AD. However, their style and form even in the later images was so closely related to previous ones, that for our purposes in studying the inception of the style and network of iconographic parallels, we can study them with their earlier manifestations.

III.

The terracotta plaques studied in this chapter can be related to contemporary sculptures made in other media. The general style of sculptured tablets in relief often with several figures packed into a single narrative frame and the repeated use of different symbolic and decorative devices seem to be shared by all the arts of the period. Curiously though, while some degree of iconographic similarity can also be present, the imagery on the terracotta plaques is closest to that represented on contemporary wooden, ivory and the occasional metal sculpture. Contemporary Buddhist sculptures from the stupas and *Caityas* have an extraordinary variety of reliefs. The iconography of a few of these can be related to terracotta images. However, the percentage of similar images shared between the two media is significantly low. Stone and terracotta are the most dominant evidence of material culture from the time. The correlation between them ought to be noted as it further assists in dating the terracotta sculpture, situates it within the broader artistic output of the period and thereby permits an evaluation of the nature of Early-Historic cultic affiliation and religious expression.

As mentioned above, the similarity between the stone and terracotta images is not so much in a shared iconography, but in a shared style, idiom of expression and a shared worldview, both being created at about the same time, however, perhaps for different ends. As a result, there are several instances where figures can be found wearing identical jewellery, costumes, seated on similar pieces of furniture or be set within architectural frames like Caitya arches and roofs with stepped merlons supported by pillars with animal capitals. At the same time, images common in terracotta, like the lady with the weapon shaped hairpins, *maithuna* scenes, figures with attributes like fish and mirrors, are not known in stone.

For instance, composite and fantastic animals like *makaras* and leogryphs are equally prominent in all the arts of the period. [*Figs. 3.294 to 3.297*] These animals have usually been described as symbols of auspiciousness and are related, ultimately to a complex pantheon derived from what Coomaraswamy described as the Ancient Indian water cosmogony.[313]

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[313] Coomaraswamy, AK 1928 (b) vol.II, pp. 15 – 17.

These figures are closely related to the entire worldview of the *Yakṣas* and *Nāgas*. At times they have riders in the shaped of winged figures or those with fish tails and fins. Sometimes hey can be seen to spout foliage loaded with jewels (as at Bharhut), in all these cases they are symbols of the plenitude of the waters from which all life springs. These similarities apart, there are significant iconographic differences as well. One of the most important being the depiction of *Yakṣīs* in the attitude of *śālabhañjikās* in stone that have so far not been found in contemporary terracotta. [*Figs. 3.298 b and c*]

In the general treatment of these figures however, there are several correspondences with the terracotta. There is an overwhelming two-dimensionality to the arts of the period and a strong abhorrence for "dead-space". Every part of the surface forms part of a busy detailing or agitated linearity. This is achieved usually by excessive ornamentation or by compacting several details and figures into a limited space.

Figures are generally heavily ornamented, wear elaborate turbans and coiffures, and are almost always closely associated with buds and blossoms. As with the terracottas, the foliage is interspersed with birds (usually ducks and swans). More importantly, the shape and styles of ornament and costume are identical in both media. Interestingly, a few pieces of jewellery have been found which can be dated to this period. [*Figs. 3.300 a and b, 3.301*]. However, one of the major differences in women's jewellery lies in the weapon shaped hairpins being reserved only for objects depicted in the 'minor' antiquities. The famous relief of *Candra Yakṣī* at Bharhut [*Fig. 3.302*] is shown wearing a necklace that is composed of *ankuṣas*, leaves and a *śrīvatsa*. Occasionally, weapons or implements like tridents and *ankuṣas* can also be seen in the stone images where they are worn as a part of a beaded string that runs diagonally across their torso [*Fig. 3.298 a*], but no stone image has been found that displays the weapons prominently as part of the hairdo. Terracotta images of female figures can also be seen wearing zoomorphic and anthropomorphic jewellery. These are usually in the form of small squat winged figures that fall as tassels on their thighs and rarely, as a chain of makara shaped pendants that runs diagonally across their torsos.

The importance given to standards and flags or *dhvajas*, also seems to be part of the general ritual paraphernalia at the time. The famous pillar from Bharhut [*Fig. 3.303*] shows a figure from horseback carrying a tall staff with a lotus shaped capital and crowned by a garland bearing winged figure. Although a standard with this image has not been found in terracotta, others have. For instance, Bengali terracottas often have a fish shaped standard associated with the goddess with weapons in her hair.

The shapes of the standards are, on the whole not dissimilar to the prevalent styles of pillars. These are usually in the form of plain shafts with bell or lotus shaped capitals, at times topped by a bead and reel moulding. The crowning element is usually a set of addorsed animals. These pillars are closely related to their free-standing Mauryan prototypes, as they are to West Asian examples. The specific relationship with Hellenistic and Western Asiatic imagery is a matter that has been repeatedly argued by scholars. Some try and ascribe a greater amount of indigenous Indian influence for the motifs versus others that see it as an expression of the diffusion of western classical motifs in antiquity. The specifics of the arguments do not concern us here. There is an undeniable link between the imagery of India as seen at sites such as Bharhut, Sanchi and the terracottas and that of the late Hellenistic period. Parallels with Scythian art, the influence of the Bactrian Greeks, the arts of Iran are not just being constantly re-evaluated but new discoveries in Central Asia are significantly altering our perception of the Eastward movement of these forms and motifs. However, the significant difference lies in the meaning and import of the motifs. An examination of how these symbols and motifs are used in India, their related myths and pantheons express a complex and entirely indigenous belief system. On account of the changing nature of Indian beliefs, particularly in the period that we are addressing, it is not easy to reconstruct with any assurance exactly what these motifs and symbols meant at the time. We are disadvantaged also because most textual information from the Subcontinent is difficult to date, and descriptive texts usually employed in deciphering art remains tend to be later than the images discussed here. At any rate, that a parallel and distinct worldview, separate from Hellenistic, Iranian and other Central Asian ideas was current, is without question. One of these was

Buddhist, another Jain, a third has been called Brahmanic, although that term is in itself loaded. At the same time several other strains of cultic affiliation usually clubbed under the umbrella of *Yakṣa* worship, seems to have been a dominant faith of the Subcontinent in the Early-Historic period that left a lasting imprint on the shape and form of subsequent religious expression. These issues are dealt with in greater detail in the subsequent Chapter.

Winged figures can be found in both media. Yet, in the stone reliefs, their role is a diminished one of garland bearing *Kinnaras* or *Gandharvas* who come flying in diagonally on either side of a relief. [*Fig. 3.304*] Their function being to draw attention to a symbol of the Buddha and proclaim his greatness. The picture in the terracottas seen earlier is different. Here the wings figure (male or female) occupies the main, central frame of the relief and is the principal focus of the plaque.

One of the greatest correspondences across all the artistic media in the post-Mauryan period is the portrayal of the goddess *Śrī-Lakṣmī* and *Gajalakṣmī*. [*Figs. 3.305 – 3.308*] She is commonly found in seals, coins, terracotta, ivory and in the reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi, and other monuments. Less popular, but equally compelling, is the portrayal of a figure that is probably related to 'Sūrya'. [*Fig. 3.309*] The earliest known depictions in stone in Central – Eastern India come from Bodhgaya and Sanchi (stupa 2).[314] These are contemporary with depictions in terracotta of figures riding chariots pulled by horses, that may also refer to the same figure.

An important preoccupation of the iconography in terracotta is the portrayal of festive rituals. Although such scenes are popular in the stone images as well, the latter medium tends to show greater numbers of scenes of music and dance with a limited number of players than long festive processions. In a rare and tiny stone cup / mould from Kaushambi, figures are found wearing elaborate pleated and drapes dancing to the music played on a bow harp by another figure. [*Fig. 3.310 a and b*] Importantly, the dancers wear bird shaped masks,

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[314] For Sanchi figure, Grünwedel, A: 1901 / 32: figs. 18 – 21.

reminding one of the elephant headed masked figures seen in at least five terracotta examples from Bengal. Ritual performances with masked dances it seems, formed part of the religious expression of the period, and one that has left little documentation save a few fragmentary reliefs.

With reference to male figures in general, it is common to find them wear large turbans with a distinct projecting element that is commonly mirrored in terracotta as well. [*Fig. 3.311 b*] An unusual image in stone however is noteworthy as it shows evidence for influences from outside India in this period. *Fig. 3.331a* of a warrior decorating one of the balustrade posts at Bharhut has frequently been discussed, and sometimes even described as a Greek.[315] Although his specific nationality is debatable, with his short curly hair, schematised zigzag of his *dhoti*, coat and with a vine or ivy leaf in his hand, he stands distinct from the other figures at Bharhut. However, heavily pleated and stitched clothes should not be assumed to always indicate Greek influence in India. Their presence on Mauryan stone *Yakṣas*,[316] wide distribution in early terracotta [*Figs. 3.39, 3.256, 3.76*] reveal other sources for inspiration that may derive from Parthian and Scythian art.[317] Other features that should be note that show some contact with Northwest and beyond include the presence of Kharoshti masons marks at Bharhut, the discovery of an Indian ivory figure at Pompeii (that must undoubtedly have reached there before 79 AD when the city was destroyed), the predominance of stepped battlement (merlon) patterns on the reliefs, to cite only a few examples. The presence of these influences no doubt fused with India's own long standing expression in the arts to create the styles encountered in the period discussed here.

Mithuna depictions again, are common across all the media of the period. They are usually found as a static and frontal pair standing beside each other. In some of them however, there is greater movement and a more narrative quality. [*Figs. 3.313 to 3.315*] *Maithuna* depictions

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[315] Carter, ML: 1968: 137 – 40, pl 7, fig. 16.

[316] As seen in the colossal *Yakṣa* from Vidisha.

[317] In this regard we should also note the presence of a particular type of hat, most likely to be related to a Phrygian prototype in fig. 3.201.

however, are not to be found in stone. They can be found on contemporary ivory plaques from Bengal, which generally closely resemble their terracotta counterparts in most respects. Their numbers however, are not anywhere near those of the terracotta.

Finally, an important set of images to be considered is of *Yakṣas* and *ganas*. The ground balustrade on the north-west side of stupa 2 at Sanchi shows the *Yakṣī Aśvamukhi* with a male child. [*Fig. 3.316*] Depictions of females with a horse ram's head are also to be found in terracotta, where they usually occur in *maithuna* groups, always engaged in sexual activity with the small grimacing demons [fig. 3.272]. This figure is, once again, probably one of the many powerful *Yakṣī* types known for their voracious sexual appetite, abduction of male children and ability to cause diseases.[318] They are closely related to *ganas* as can be seen in the terracotta plaques. Her presence on a stupa railing is unusual. In their absorption into the Buddhist pantheon, such figures were either given a subordinate status or rarely, transformed into one of many Bodhisattvas in the Jātakas.

Two sides of a railing pillar of the first century BC from District Gurgaon, Haryana in the collection of the Mathura Museum show a figure type seen several times already in terracotta. [*Figs. 3.317, 3.318*] They are squat dwarves with large bellies, their faces furrowed, ears usually pointed, goggle-eyed and with prominent and large genitals. In Buddhist contexts they are usually seen as atlantes as seen in the South face of the entrance to the caves at Pitalkhora or supporting the *toranas* at Sanchi. [*3.319, 3.320*] Like with many other iconographic types discussed above, their subordinated role in Buddhism stands in contrast to the more prominent and prolific status enjoyed by these figures in terracotta. This feature forms an interesting argument between the concerns of the two cults. These figures form a part of the kindred group of *Yakṣas* and *rākṣasas*, that probably enjoyed a more prominent and feared position in other pre-Buddhist cults. It is interesting also to note that when the sculptors of Sanchi had to chose a form for the depiction of the demons of Mārā's army, they

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[318] This class of deities is discussed in the following chapter.

chose to represent them like these characters. [*Fig. 3.321*] Undoubtedly, this figure type was already well established and known for its generally fierce nature.

The terracotta arts of the period share a general stylistic expression with their Buddhist counterparts. This is seen in the techniques of composition, ornament, figure types and in some cases even in their iconography. However the different role given to characters that look similar can betray two significant points. First, that these objects share a common worldview, where each community or religious group manipulates the same forms to their own ends. Second, that the differences between them are not always as overt as the presence or absence of certain iconographies in either media, but more subtle. Characters dominant in one set are subordinated or marginalised in another. What was the nature of these characters, and why that might have been the case, are issues addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

SCULPTURES ANONYMOUS
A SURVEY OF THE POST-ASOKAN CULTURAL CLIMATE

Different interpretative discussions have been initiated on a large corpus of early historic moulded terracotta in the previous chapters of this work. These included viewing them in the context of the studies that have been previously conducted on them, (2) establishing that there exists both an overt and tacit, regional and national, and at times, religiously identifiable language of symbols in operation, (3) that at least some of the images encountered are pan-Indic and exhibit one of the most elaborate and complex 'iconographic networks' in Indian art-history. In chapter 2, we briefly looked at the terracotta arts of post-Mauryan India as both, a transformation and reinterpretation of age-old ideas, already in existence in the Subcontinent over millennia, and, as an unparalleled, dramatic innovation in the style and history of Indian anthropomorphic imagery and iconography. The wide variety within this imagery, the issues surrounding their dating and their geographical / archaeological contexts, were studied in the previous chapter. Finally, chapter 3 also considered the iconography of some key images, critically examining previously held views and suggesting some anew.

It has been the quest of several art-historians to determine the identity of the figures depicted in post-Mauryan terracotta. As mentioned earlier, at the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to know for certain. That does not however preclude the terracotta from being used as valuable sources for the history of Indian art and society. The data encountered here is rich and varied and to ask it the same questions repeatedly is unlikely to suddenly yield very different or more conclusive results.

A more comprehensive empirical examination of the nature of the images has shown that the terracotta reveal a culture that is both a part of a Subcontinental worldview, and one that has equally significant individual, local expressions. Connected at one level by a common artistic grammar in technique, form and symbol, and differentiated at times by variegated regional

and localised concerns, iconography and style. Undoubtedly, the fundamental and natural first question in encountering an image is to ask it to identify itself. But we are denied a clear reply to our question by post-Mauryan terracotta. We can still however, situate them within what we know of their context: political, religious and economic. We can then use these images to further inform our understanding of their contemporary culture. In this process, we can use the images to tell us more about their religious mores, that are so far only suggested on the basis of textual information, whether Sanskrit or Pāli.

Any study that aims to present the exhaustive and detailed information available on the economic, social and religious history of India from the late third century BC to the end of the first century AD in a single chapter, is bound to be concise. This chapter aims to selectively summarise those aspects of historical information available for this period that might help us better appreciate the imagery discussed here. For this, research on both textual and inscriptional sources has been collected. The primary sources and modern research cited here are selected to show the changing nature of society and religion witnessed in Early-Historic North India and not to arrive at conclusions regarding the identity of the figures. Through such an exercise it is hoped that at least a more immediate worldview and context for these figures can be established which subsequent research may be able to exploit further for more conclusive results regarding the specific cult expressed in terracotta.

A variety of literary, and material cultural remains pertaining to this period can be employed by the historian. Chapter 2 established the need to look at the culture that produced this imagery in the light of the continuity in cultural motivation / impulse from at least the late-Harappan times. However, correlating the archaeological and literary data from this period is difficult and the problems therein are constantly being redefined. The biggest being that the prodigious literary data is of a culture highly sophisticated, which the archaeological data from the same period cannot always really match in purport, much less so in actual physical expression. The literary data is subject to constant accretion, interpolation and, by virtue of being a part of an oral tradition, cannot be clearly dated. However, one of the greatest hurdles to be crossed by historians and art historians alike, is another dichotomy: The literary culture

was probably not the expression of the civilisation at large, while the patrons of the simpler and more everyday remains of Copper-Hoards, pottery, coins and figurines in clay discovered at the sites may reflect a wider social base. Using the literary records to unravel the meanings of the images and their role must be attempted with tremendous caution.

Many deities seem to have some features that are similar to those on sculptures of subsequent periods. As a result, these early terracotta plaques are usually looked upon as prototypes for subsequent iconography, or, as products of an age in which these deities were still nebulous and their iconography not yet fixed. Both these lines of enquiry remain valid. At the same time, widespread cultural demarcators like post-Mauryan terracotta warrant more comment than being dismissed as incipient formulations that subsequent sculpture drew upon. [1] Rather, the consistency and uniformity in their iconographic programme across 2000 miles proves, that to their original audience, these deities were hardly amorphous. Indeed, as various historians have suggested, I agree that they must have been precursors to subsequent imagery which modern scholarship is able to identify more specifically. In addition, we must try to assess what forces might have guided the production of these images which form a consistent cult of their own. This chapter attempts to tease information from a variety of sources to reconstruct the socio-economic, religious and ideological climate that might have influenced the production of these images.

A second, allied objective of this chapter is to address what special forces might suddenly have coloured the atmosphere in this period which led, as far as we are aware, to the first expression of an *organised* iconography of anthropomorphic divinities. By the post-Mauryan period many different religious strains were current. This is important as it provides a context for the history of Indian religions in the Kuṣāna to Early Mediaeval periods which are known to incorporate myriad threads from various traditions.

[1] Hence the appellations of proto-Skanda, proto-Kāma and proto-Shiva are often used to describe these images which bear one or more of the iconographic attributes of these gods, without ever clearly expressing *all* their qualities. See for example references in Lerner and Kossak: 1991, Agrawala: 1936, Kala: 1980, Auboyer: 1981 among others.

Anthropomorphic divinities, which may serve to remind the worshipper of god, or themselves be considered living personifications of god made their first *'organised'* appearance in the post-Mauryan period. Further, within this period, nowhere do they make so emphatic and clear a mark as in the terracotta sculpture. This sudden appearance of anthropomorphism with a formal iconographic programme begs us to question their cultural origins : Where did they come from and why were they there?

The question of finding the sources for anthropomorphism, is one of the oldest debates in Indology. So far this debate has been situated largely in the first century AD with regard to the coming of the Buddha image. In recent years the origin of the Jina image is also being given more importance.[2] Lakṣmī too is known to have been an ancient goddess, commonly depicted on Buddhist stupa railings, coins and seals from the late second century BC. However, though these three figures may be the oldest Indian icons still in worship, (and hence recognisable to us), the figures in post-Mauryan terracotta are earlier. They are also iconographically consistent from the NWFP to Bengal, and so must form our very first category of a widespread and clear plastic expression of religious art which antedates the Buddha or Jina image. The debate on anthropomorphism in Indian religious art must therefore be taken back by roughly 200 years. As mentioned above, identifying the specific ideology that these figures express is not possible. All the same, it is equally important to acknowledge the fact that it is there, and that itself prompts this chapter on what forces inform or lead to the production of these images in this period. But before we proceed, it would be right to remind

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[2] Our current knowledge on the early development of Jain images is summed up by Pal, "When exactly the Jains began venerating images of their Jinas is not known. Some scholars identify as a Jina figure, a small nude male torso discovered at Harappa and said to belong to the third millennium BCE. The Jain tradition itself believes that images of Mahāvīra were created during his lifetime. Inscriptional evidence indicates that a Jina image was set up in Kalinga (modern Orissa) at least as early as the fourth century BCE, when it was taken away by an invading Nanda ruler of Magadha, to the north. The earliest incontestably Jain figure is the famous polished sandstone torso found in Lohanipur in Bihar and now in the Patna museum, though its exact date is disputed. Epigraphical evidence at Mathura, supported by Jain tradition indicates that a stupa must have been built at Kankali Tila several centuries before the Common Era. If indeed it was, then it may have been a large and unostentatious structure of wood and rubble like the early stupas of the Buddhists and the so-called Aśokan stupas surviving only in Patan, Nepal, today." P. Pal, 1994, p. 16.
Whether some of these earliest images are "incontestably" Jain is debatable, as is their date. At any rate, even if these early icons are Jain, they are nowhere as nearly popular, or as systematised as the terracotta icons of the Early-Historic period. Consequently, we can still consider post-Mauryan imagery our earliest widespread, iconographically organised religious imagery.

ourselves of the first assumption established in Chapter 3: that in post-Mauryan terracotta there is a coherent iconographic programme which is more widespread and systematised than anything we can find anterior to that date.

Despite the apparent lack of any binding or overarching political authority in post-Mauryan India, there is a distinct and well developed sculptural style that spans all of Northern South Asia. It is a sculptural style maintained at Mahasthangarh (Bangladesh) at one end of the Subcontinent, travels through Bengal, Bihar, the Nepali Terai, UP, Haryana, Punjab and up until Taxila in the North West Frontier. It is not a single monolithic style: it has its regional flavours, but is clearly a style knitted together. This is a characteristic of the material remains of the period that use certain attitudes which underlie all subsequent imagery. It is not that we have never seen any of these ideals expressed before, indeed some of them have found reference earlier, but never have so many been so clearly and so loudly been expressed: this is significant.

We see therefore some formulae for depiction: a figure, standing upon, or arising from a lotus, in a shrine or an enclosed space in which she is being venerated, the shrine itself can be a *caitya*, a flat-roofed structure or a space demarcated by a *vedika*. What also emerges is a conscious deployment of confidence in pose, at times heraldic and at others, in deliberate poses of dance. Gestures (*mudras* and *hastas*), one of the most important languages of sculptural communication include for the first time, those commonly known as *varada* (bestowing a favour), *abhaya* (assuring protection), *lola* (going freely). The use of symbolic attributes that are both martial (an axe, trident, mace, *cakra*, spear) and auspicious *mangalas* (a lotus, palm-print, pair of fish, earthen pot). There is also a hierarchy: importance of the central figure accentuated by the parasol over the head, the presence of subsidiary diminutive attendants who either bow, carry offerings, stand with their hands in *añjali* or hold *cauris*. And these are only the most common devices. A further investigation begins to reveal 'patterned variations' within this language to both show differences and simultaneously, *relate* one image to another. For instance, the pose of the goddess with one hand akimbo while the other falls by her side usually wears weapons in her hair. At other times, she may also have a symbol

like the parasol over her to further enhance her divine status. However, in some cases, the pose may be present in figures where no other symbolic devices have been employed. The weapons in the figures' headdresses too are another case in point. At times three, commonly five, and in some cases ten or even twelve. In the Indo-Gangetic Divide and the Upper Gangetic Valley the weapons are frequently seen with stalks of foliage. This goddess with the weapons can at times stand on a lotus or a pot, she may be enshrined and in some cases be seen in the context of a *mithuna* depiction. Several variables are thus at work. These serve to relate one object or manifestation of this divinity with another. Many other such relational equations between figures and the symbols employed by them can be cited. There is of course nothing remarkable about this fact for those who are familiar with the variety of techniques employed by artists in subsequent religious imagery in India. However, we have no record of such a complex *network* of form and symbol in India prior to this date. In the light of this it does not seem at all unreasonable to me to make the first assumption for this chapter that what is seen in this period, and in the terracotta in particular, is a systematised pantheon of divinities, initiating the use of a symbolic language in Indian art.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, we have no contemporary or normative textual / canonical scaffolding which may help us interpret them. Various suggestions have however been made, and they have been discussed along with the images in Chapter 3. In situating these images within their cultural history, some of them are brought up again here, as are avenues for further study that might be more culturally informative.

II

A Culture in Flux: 'Asokan' India

Some key aspects of early Indian religion can also be garnered from the inscriptions of Aśoka dated to the third century BC. The rock edicts left by him provide conclusive proof for the nature of religious practice elaborated here and refer to the general climate of the period in which the objects discussed were made. The inscriptions are concerned with promoting Aśoka's Dhamma while denouncing the currently held modes of worship that involve festive

gatherings, rites commonly performed by Brahmins, women and others. The following three quotations are cited as examples.[3]

Rock edict 1: "Here (i.e. in the locality of the edict) no sacrifice shall be performed by immolating a living thing whatsoever and no festive gathering held. King Priyadarshin, beloved of the gods, sees many faults in (such) a gathering. There are however, certain festive gatherings approved as good by King Priyadarśin..."

Rock Edict 4: "In olden times, deprivation of life and harm done to living beings...the derision of the Brahmins and Śramanas constantly grew. Today by the practice of piety on the part of King Priyadarśin, beloved of the gods, the sound of the drum has become the sound of the doctrine; such as could not be (increased) in the past, during many hundred years, by exhibiting to the people the sight of celestial mansions, the sight of celestial elephants, and host of fiery and similar other celestial forms; has been increased today by imparting of instructions in the law of piety by King Priyadarśin."

Rock Edict 9: "There are people who perform various auspicious rites in times of illness, or on occasions of marriage of sons and daughters, or on those of births of sons, or in setting out on a journey to a distant place, - on this and on (similar) other occasions the people perform various auspicious rites. Here particularly the womenfolk perform many and diverse, minor and meaningless rites. If the auspicious rite is to be performed (it should be noted that) such a rite produces small fruit..."

Two things are learnt from these quotations. 1. That there were well established and popular religious practices current in the period of Aśoka which involved gatherings, festivities, rituals performed by Brahmins, and more common practices performed by people on specific occasions. 2. That Aśoka shunned them in favour of his more tempered state policy of *dhamma*. Why Aśoka sought to marginalise these practices and the impact of his measures

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[3] Quoted from NR Ray: 1975: pp. 55 – 56.

does not concern us here. But that religious tensions that were active in his reign is clear. In fact, Aśoka's brand of *dhamma* as promoted by his state machinery testifies to the strained relations between the members of different sects within his empire that this ethical code was trying to assuage[4]. For instance, his Major Rock Edicts 7 and 12 mention how Aśoka Piyadassi desires that all sects may dwell peacefully, practice their doctrines without harm to, or compromising another, that they should watch their speech and not disparage another sect, etc. His edicts make repeated appeals to the ideals of toleration between the different religious communities of his empire. Aśoka even had a state administrative machinery (the *Dhammamahāmātas*) to see to the enforcement of this *dhamma*.

These attitudes of Aśoka have generally been interpreted as a reaction against "behavioural Brahmanism"[5] and popular gatherings. These social festivities afforded the people an opportunity to display their arts of music and dance, ("*Gīta*, *Nritya* and *Vādita*" – as indicated in the Hāthigumpha inscription of King Khāravela). The *Samājas* were an integral social institution, indicated also by Kautilya, where he says that *Utsava*, *Sāja* and *Vihāra* were the three institutions which a conqueror must respect. Aśoka is, in his inscriptions revealing another new set of ideas which are defined in contrast to the prevalent social and religious practices. His *dhamma*, was ostensibly calmer, it assuaged religious tensions, it also tried to dissuade his citizens from the gatherings which might have held the potential of rising into millenarian dissension or cause for religious or 'communal' tensions. To that extent the popular arts of the Mauryan and immediate post-Mauryan phases can be taken as an expression of these more common faiths.

The traditional view that the Mauryan 'Empire' was an overarching and heavily centralised state with its capital at Pataliputra has now been reconsidered. The previous view had a misleading effect on scholarship. In art history it led scholars to present the Mauryan as a single unified expression, common methods and styles of sculpting and motivated by the same limited political desires (palaces and pillars), religious desires (Buddhist and Yakṣa) and

[4] Romila Thapar addresses the nature of Aśoka's Dhamma extensively in Thapar, 1973.

politico-religious desires (Dhamma, Cakravartin Emperors and Achaemenid inspired control of the State's cultural and ritual observances). Historically, this interpretation could not explain how the transition to such a state occurred so rapidly between the formation of tribal confederacies around the sixth century BC to an empire by the fourth. Nor could it account for the total absence of even a conception of any such 'nation' in post-Mauryan Ancient India.[6]

Thapar has shown how sub-metropolitan regions grew into metropolitan ones in early India. These existed along with various differentiated economic and political systems that ranged from hunting and gathering to producing societies and areas that did not know a state system.[7] Along with the historical complexities in the transference of tribal and lineage based groups to States, caste mobility, the movement from rural to urban and rise of tertiary occupations came a host of cultural changes. But no cultural change occurs without knowledge and memory of its history. Yakṣa forms coexisted with emerging gods, giving them an identity their own, but with reference to their predecessors in their patrons' minds. Old folklores and heroes similarly interacted with new ones, whether 'Brahmanic', Buddhist, Hellenistic or any other.

Significant advances in reconstructing the nature of Mauryan expansionism have shown how the nature of administration and trade was conditioned by the need to tap, control and draw the best from 1. Manpower for agriculture and warfare, and 2. Animals, iron and other raw materials for strengthening the state and effective lucrative trade in instruments of warfare and luxury goods.[8]

At the most basic level, it is in this context of warfare and need for progeny, where every extra hand was an economic benefit and security, that we must situate our imagery. The

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[5] Ray, NR, 1975, p. 56.

[6] Thapar, R.: 1995: p. 123 and 1987: pp. 1 – 31.

[7] Thapar: 1987: p.4

[8] One of the most valued objects of trade was horses and elephants, desperately needed by any army, in an age ridden with warfare.

ubiquitous post-Mauryan goddess with her weapons offering strength, power and protection on one side of her hair, foliage and grain to nurture and make fertile on the other, rich and adorned, broad-hipped, with her partner and with a variety of other motifs that highlight her generative and fecund qualities, is then a goddess par excellence, addressing the most essential needs of her society and age.

In accepting the concomitant presence of several unifying core ideas and independent local variations as a historical given already prevalent in the Mauryan period, the Early-Historic moulded plaques can be looked at as documents preserving exactly such a paradigm. They show the strength of personalised cultural expression in toys, narratives, rituals, myths, and personal aspirations both divine and material through terracotta that was widely and easily available.

In 1980, SP Gupta raised some of these issues amongst a host of others surrounding Mauryan art. Speaking specifically of the art of terracotta he felt it was closely linked with the phenomenon of urbanism.[9] He emphasised the role of markets in creating a machinery which established channels for the demand and supply of material products. Terracotta images form one of many industries that would be promoted in such an environment. It was, he feels, a period when various forces were acting together; forces which mark the commencement of the Early Historic period in India.[10] Even the nature of religious ideas was such that it catered to an ideology favourable to an emergent middle class. It was "a very happy historical situation of the close interaction of the growing middle class and the growing monastic orders of different religions...This very middle class was responsible for the huge quantities of terracotta figurines of the Mauryan and Śungan periods."[11] In a key article on "The Social Milieu of Ancient Indian Terracottas"[12], Devangana Desai furthers such a 'Social History of Art', by

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[9] Gupta, SP: 1980: pp. 173-174, 177-179.

[10] Gupta lays great stress on economic factors. In seeking the impetus for Mauryan art he says, "Mauryan art was a product of the Mauryan socio-economic order, it could neither emerge a century before nor be held back for a century." (*Ibid.* pp.11.)

[11] *Ibid.* p.178.

linking development in terracotta art to urbanism. She says that because of the fact that the plaques are moulded and therefore, mass-produced, with complex iconographic norms and highly sophisticated and refined features, they must be products of the *nāgaraka* or urban middle classes.

Almost all of the excavated sites ('cities') from Mahasthangarh to Taxila reveal a cohesive iconography of figures for the first time ever, and this consistency is expressed mostly in terracotta. Undoubtedly, as I have argued elsewhere, I concur with the scholarly exertions of Desai and others that the style and method of production of these images show they were intended for relatively large audiences and that socio-economic writings can aid our understanding of who used them. Yet, by dismissing these objects as merely material products that serve as social indicators, created *because* of emergent towns, trade routes and middle classes – we undermine any other ritualistic, cultic factors that might lead to the significant appearance of organised anthropomorphism in this period. While their arguments do help in constructing a valuable social history of art so we can better appreciate the environment the icons were used in, the resultant commoditisation of faith, ritual and art cannot explain the symbolism or meanings underlying the images that might help us determine why they were made. To this end, a brief history of Indic religio-philosophical ideas that might in some way have buttressed this iconism follows.

CHANGING CULTIC 'PRACTICES'

In his article on "Changes in the Vedic Priesthood" Inden shows an allegedly unitary liturgical tradition was in fact incorporating several changes in its practice in the Early-Historic period.[13] His examination of Vedic sources reveals that by the Early-Historic period, 'Brahmanical' practitioners had differing views of how the world should be ordered. This is evident from the varying claims to authority laid by different sets of brahmans, highlighting in particular the

[12] In Amy Poster (ed.): 1986; many of the ideas in this article have also been expressed by Desai: 1978, pp. 143-168; and again in 1983: pp. 59-65. On the economic implications of the "second urbanisation", see Sharma, R.S.: 1983. However, what constitutes "urban" in the Indian context, warrants some attention, see Chakrabarti, DK, 1995:pp. 248-49, 258-66.

contestable position of the Atharva Veda in relation to the more cohesive triple Veda (Rg, Yajur and Sāma). Not only does the study show the changing nature of preferred knowledge systems in the Maurya-Śunga period, it demonstrates that with the rise of theistic cults Vedic mantras and Smārta rites were appropriated to further image worship.[14] A discussion on the growing awareness of theistic ideas in the already changing religious climate of post-Mauryan India is taken up at the end of this chapter.

Although scholars have tried to interpret the vivid and poetic imagery in the triple Veda and their appended Brahmanas as sources available for visual translation, Vedic texts are not really favourable toward image worship. For instance, VS Agrawala[15] has shown how the fundamental mother goddess assumes various different names like *Aditi, Sarma, Prithvi,* in Vedic literature, and that it is the same goddess who develops into *Śri Lakṣmī* and is canonised as such in Indic religions. The early terracotta goddesses he therefore feels, might correspond to those early Vedic appellations. However, even though that might be the case, studies that seek to explain the origins of anthropomorphic iconography in India in Vedic sources alone, do not adequately explain the specific changes in the Early-Historic period that created an environment conducive to image worship. Furthermore, they do not account for the reasons why established pantheons of Vedic names needed to be appended to, metamorphosed into or even absorbed by the rising and recognisable cults of Vāsudeva / Vishnu or Shiva and the later manifestations of Devi.

This is not to dismiss the validity of studying Vedic sources for Indian imagery. The texts remain the most ancient literature of the Subcontinent. Whether, when and by whoever they may actually have been followed, they certainly established one definition of Sacred, that all subsequent spiritual discourse had at least to acknowledge. To that extent, the varied ideas on the nature of gods incorporated in them continued to impress upon Indians henceforth. One cannot imagine that post-Mauryan Indian terracotta images, which were themselves

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[13] Inden, R.: 1992: pp. 557, 573.

[14] *Ibid.*: pp. 567-68

expressing a widespread cult, were completely unaware of Vedic rituals.[16] However, the images must be situated in the more complex environment in which they were born.

Any religiously charged image is by its very nature, the object or medium of worship. Whatever the specific motivations and nature of that worship may have been, we can safely assume that it was accompanied by some semblance of ritual and liturgy which has often in the Indian Brahmanical context sought validation in Vedic practices. At the same time, even if the imagery does explicate a world at least *informed* by Vedic liturgy, that does not account for what prompted the transmutation of ephemeral ritual and liturgy meant to be essentially experienced, into a plastic or visual medium that is material, and performs very different functions? There can be no definite answer to such a question. However, the progression of religious and cultural thought in the Subcontinent, (albeit with all the pitfalls of the lack of any precise chronology for the texts) may be helpful.

The complex and at times abstruse writings of the Upaniṣads are important not for understanding iconography, but to appreciate that there was, from the earliest evidence of the history of religion in India a constantly changing and dynamic environment. These rifts and fissures might themselves, as suggested by Heesterman, be indicative of a, "Dynamic view of society and culture as organised around an inner conflict."[17] The Upaniṣadic works had already shown a move towards asceticism, documenting the increasingly philosophical climate that reacted to Vedic ritualism, approaching more personalised metaphysical preoccupations: a mode in which rose six (or perhaps more) heterodox sects a few centuries before the images studied here.[18]

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[15] Agrawala, V.S.: 1984 (reprint): pp. 16 – 17, 22 – 27.
[16] Indeed, if the *Purana-Itihasa* tradition is to be believed, kings of the Śunga dynasty initiated a Brahmanic revival and conducted elaborate Vedic rituals like the *aśvamedha*.

[17] Heesterman, 1985, p.12

[18] Buddhist and Jain texts often mention six sects and their leaders who were contemporaries of the Buddha or Mahavira. Their teachings are denigrated in relation to those of their own master in order to further extol the teachings of the latter. However, these texts do not always mention the same six sects. It seems that with the Upaniṣadic vindication of the life and persuasion of the *śramana* (wandering ascetics) many gathered their own flock of followers; and there may well have been more than six such leaders.

However, the nature of discourse in the Upaniṣads and the early heterodox texts does not provide for common religious *practice*, of which the terracotta must be an expression. At the same time, they never cease to provide an intellectual ballast for Indic religions. These texts also reveal the intellectual dissatisfaction with current thought, and the fillip ideas of asceticism received as a result of this descant upon prevalent moorings. It was this sanction to wandering ascetics (*śramanas*) that helped engender the heterodox sects, including 'Ājivikism', Buddhism and Jainism.

In his reconstruction of the faith of the Ājīvikas, Basham noted that we could not use Buddhist and Jain sources with any precision to recreate the history of other sects. Nevertheless, as he says, these Buddhist and Jain texts are the only sources of our knowledge of the age (Early Historic India).[19] Yet, even though Basham may have been successful in gleaning some information on the philosophical preoccupations of one sect by studying those of another, none of those methods need necessarily help us reconstruct how any of those faiths used images. Especially since early Buddhist and Jain texts are curiously silent about image worship. Scholars have questioned this absence repeatedly, and different reasons have been suggested over the years. Indological investigation in, and reconstruction of early Theravada Buddhism has ensued for over two centuries with growing popularity in recent years. A distinction between the elite and popular forms of the religion was made, and mostly it is the former that has remained the focus of Buddhist scholarship.[20] Euro–American writings, translations, the prodigious Pali Text Society, have studied what the Buddha taught and not what Buddhists did, and, even less as to what they might have done in Early-Historic India.[21]

The six that are commonly mentioned are, Makkhali Gosala (the leader of the Ājīvikas and promoter of *Niyati*, pre determinism), Purna Kassapa (probably also of Ājīvika persuation, discussed at length by Basham, 1951: fn. 11), Nigantha Nataputta (Jain), Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kallayana (an atomist) and Sanjaya Belatthiputta (an agnostic).

[19] Basham, 1951: p.10.

[20] For an historiography tracing the biases that exist on account of the fact that much of the writing was by colonialists or missionaries, products of early 18th to 19th century European values and for valuable bibliographic references in this regard see Trainor, 1997.

[21] As Schopen says, "that an overriding textual orientation was in place very early in Buddhist studies", and as a result of this heavy textual orientation, "this is an archaeology truly in the service of written

Strange, since it is the early Therevada Buddhist *stupas* and sculptures, which are known to be expressions of *popular* Early-Historic Buddhism, that have attracted the most attention in the art-history of that period.[22] Recent scholarship has shown how our study has been victim to the notion that the earliest Buddhism was the truest, and therefore later cults and subsequent image worship - not authentic. Further, much of modern rewriting of early Buddhism has regarded any ritualised worship directed toward the iconic Buddha as a debasement of the original tradition. Considering this bias towards even the Buddha's image, it is hardly surprising that the still earlier 'primitive / animistic' icons of Nāgas and Yakṣas that abound in early Buddhist archaeology have received little attention with regard to the rituals, history and influences that they might have exerted.[23]

A significant redress in Buddhology is seen in the challenging and thought provoking recent studies by Gregory Schopen[24], Frank Reynolds[25], Kevin Trainor,[26] and others. And it is this methodological shift of looking at Buddhist archaeology, (contemporary with post-Mauryan terracotta), to reconstruct Buddhism as it was practised, that we could extend to see other post-Aśokan archaeology as tangible expressions of post-Aśokan religious practice. That is, post-Mauryan terracotta can be read in the same way as the Bharhut and Amaravati reliefs have been, in order to be able to reconstruct the practical face of religion in the period. Further, we know that philosophical exercises in textual traditions seek to discuss more profound differences in their faiths with reference to others current in the same age. Similarly,

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records, no matter how idealised the latter may be, an archaeology that will find itself forced to retire ...." And, "This is at best a curious kind of history, a kind of history that – to put it more simply – seems to assume that if it says so in a canonical text, it must be so in reality." "It would appear then, that the ascription of primacy to textual sources in Buddhist studies not only effectively neutralises the independence of archaeological and epigraphical sources as witnesses, it also effectively excludes what practising Buddhists did and believed from the history of their own religion." Schopen, G.: 1997 reprint: "Archaeology and Protestant Suppositions", pp. 1, 2, 6, 9.

[22] Regarding the interpretation of stupa sculptures in light of later texts, not contemporary with the structure and the problems therein, see Jonathan S. Walters, 1997.

[23] Except the early works of Coomaraswamy, Zimmer, etc.

[24] "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the History of Indian Buddhism"; *History of Religions 31,* 1991, pp.1-23; reprinted 1997, Hawaii.

[25] Frank Reynolds, 1976, pp. 37-61.

[26] Trainor, Kevin, 1997, *Relics, Ritual and Representation in Buddhism*, Cambridge. See also Willis, Michael: 2000

in their practical world of birth, marriage and death ceremonies, ways of venerating icons and causes thereof, we can assume that one tradition must refer to another by either seeking to differentiate itself from the other or by using common modes of worship.

Similar distinctions had also been made in the understanding of Hinduism, with the divide between the higher metaphysical philosophy of Brahmanic texts and the common, superstitious, idolatrous Hinduism being a far removed practise of the largely non-literate masses. The same paradigm was brought into art-history where, though it seemed obvious that sculpture and architecture were the focus of popular religious practice, there seemed little use in studying it complete with the 'higher' Hindu philosophical treatises. This divide in Hinduism was seen in the disparaging attitude towards village art that was held for many years. But by and large, especially over the past 50 years, there is a growing effort, initiated largely by anthropologists, and the increasing influence of ethno-archaeology to study a region complete, even with all its seemingly contradictory material, literary, religious, social culture; a trend that is popular with modern scholarship in Theravada Buddhism as well. An interdisciplinary study of this nature is, perhaps, the only way possible to try and better understand post-Mauryan terracotta. And it is here that we must look to some of the recent studies in Post-Aśokan Buddhology, especially those writings concerned with reconstructing material culture, rituals and relic worship, festivals and performance.

The corpus of material made of terracotta, ivory and other 'minor' arts form a huge cohesive bloc with many independent, but related strains within it and shares some concerns with broadly contemporary relief sculptures on Buddhist monuments. Another look at these terracotta sculptures through the lens of the recent reconstructions of contemporaneous Buddhist *practice* will help us create at least a more relevant worldview, perhaps more immediate to the audience of the terracotta plaques than the previous exclusively Buddhist, and exclusively philosophical scholarship.

There is thus, already an academic shift, where scholars are going back to empirically looking at archaeological data from this period, an approach which is shared in this thesis. Gregory

Schopen's critique has convincingly stressed the need to re-examine the archaeology to bring new questions to bear on an understanding of the period which has largely been constructed through textual sources, and further, so that particular texts can be seen as products of particular ages.[27]

In a paper furthering the work of Schopen and Reynolds, Jonathan Walters examines three texts, the *Apadana*, *Buddhavamsa* and *Cariyapitaka* which he dates to the immediate post-Aśokan period from when the greatest dateable building activity and inscriptions survive[28]. Although the dating of the texts may be questioned, the spirit of his conclusion provides a valid means to look at stupa imagery. Through these texts he attempts to shed more light on the contemporary historical situation that early-historic *stupas* should be situated in. The texts reveal that worship included the use of wreaths, precious substances, incense, lamp-stands, musical instruments and songs. Buddhist texts and other stories were ritually recited or enacted, and such performances were an integral part of the festivals before *stupas*, which were considered manifestations of a living presence of the Buddha.[29] We already have, therefore, in the stupa itself, an 'object' of worship. This 'object' is personal, deified and without being anthropomorphic, has all the qualities that the worship of an image involves.

There are many depictions of celebrations and festivals in the reliefs surrounding these *stupas*. These have usually been considered to be representations of a handful of historical incidents which are said to show the 'aniconic' representation of the Buddha (like the royal processions at Ajātshatru's relic march, the division of the relics by Aśoka, all scenes of worship at trees interpreted as *bodhi puja,* etc.). This has been seriously questioned by Susan Huntington who

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[27] Schopen, G: 1997: "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman / Monk Distinction and the Doctrines on the Transference of Merit", originally published 1985.

[28] Walters, *op. Cit* p.1, 5-6.

[29] *Ibid.* p.27 (fn. 28), p.13. Walters highlights the role of the Apadāna (which he dates to a period that is contemporary with the Śunga terracotta) in lending further light on this, especially with regard to the use of different materials used in the worship. Trainor, *op. Cit.* similarly traces the importance of festivals and ritual recitations that were imported into Sri Lanka along with the cult of relic veneration that *stupas* and Buddhism brought. The inclusion of these different acts of worship, which involve mass participation, expect people to be collected and organised shows also the changing nature of Buddhism from its more monastic pre-Aśokan history to an increasingly popular faith.

says that they are representations of the actual re-enactment of those stories from the Buddha's biography, festivals commemorating those incidents that had become a part of the ritual fabric of the period. She further says that it is those rituals, festivals and performances that are being represented and not repeated references to an 'aniconic' presence of the Buddha.[30] Rather than the complex symbolism accorded these reliefs on the basis of texts which do not necessarily explain the carvings, the reliefs must be taken to represent the worldview of the Buddhists and others who donated them and worshipped at these spots. These are illustrations of the very festivals, myths and rituals that would have been current between the first century BC and first century AD.[31]

In addition to the empty thrones, symbols of trees, footprints and festivities, the carvings on the *stupas* reveal another class of people participating in the *stupa* cult: these are the super-human *Devas, Yakshas, Nāgas* and other mythical beings. *Stupas* are edifices surrounded by the then popular consumption of stories of magic, ghosts and deities which bear strong resemblance to the types of characters in terracotta, although the specific identity of the protagonists themselves is apparently different. They can be seen propitiating or guarding the *stupa* or joining in the festivities associated with it. And their widespread occurrence betrays their rooted status in the collective subconscious of the builders, worshipers and performers at the *stupa*. This is evidenced in the early textual sources as well.[32] It should be made clear here, that finding *exact* iconographic parallels between the terracotta and stone images is rare, and usually limited to images of *Lakṣmī* and *Gaja-lakṣmī*. The scenes in stone are Buddhist in their content with Jātaka tales and other characters absorbed into early Buddhist imagery, while the terracotta have different, unidentifiable divinities. Yet, there exists in both a world of giants and dwarves, *gandharvas* and *kinnaras*, royals and beautiful maidens. More importantly, they are treated in the same way, with obviously common modes of extolling a god, semi-divinity or important historical personage like a *Cakravartin* or a Buddha. This is underscored by the common symbolic vocabulary of gesture, posture and motif outlined

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[30] Huntington, S ,1992: pp. 111-155.
[31] *Op.cit.* p.12

above. However, just as the terracottas speak in a dialect related to their contemporary Buddhist cousins, they can be read in much the same way as well. That is to say, not only is the paradigm worthy of extension to show a world of similar *yakṣas, gandharvas, apsaras* but also how these once divine beings were worshipped. Just as the Buddhist reliefs show the nature of ritual and festivity that was directed by the people to their stupas and 'aniconic' (yet personified) symbols, so do the terracotta reliefs. The major difference it seems, is only one – we do not know for certain who is being propitiated in the terracotta.

Before we examine the nature of the faiths active in the period, a brief detour into the nature of the patronage of the images might help us identify to some extent the motivations that caused them to be produced and more importantly, what *function* the images performed. Denied any inscriptions on these terracotta, we are unable to specifically reconstruct who made them and why.[33] However, the earliest images of the Buddha, made between 50 – 150 years later than the terracotta, carry more information. These, along with he reliefs on *stupa* railings, are also among the earliest inscribed images that can be used as sources for historical reconstruction.

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[32] See for instance, the references cited by Coomaraswamy: 1928(b) and Misra: 1981.

[33] The fact that Yaksha and Yakshi worship was current when early Buddhist iconography was being formulated is well known. Yet, as Harle says that, "Yakshas are minor local deities whose worship is of immemorial antiquity..... The Bharhut Yakshas however, and the Yaksis, their female counterparts, were it not for the names inscribed upon them... would be taken for princely donors or rich merchants and their wives for except for the animals on which some of them stand... they are not iconographically different in any way." (Harle, 1986, second edn.:1994: p. 29). Though none of the figures of terracottas seen so far seem to be standing on animals or any other *vahanas*, many of them can not be mistaken for donors, or as secular portraits on account of the supernatural depictions (like wings, specific attributes like weapons etc.) accorded to them. There are others however, which could easily be secular plaques, and since we do not have the luxury of reading inscriptions on any of these terracottas, it is almost impossible to ascertain who they are. Related to this is the questionable presence of inscriptions at Bharhut. While it is not my intention to doubt the antiquity of the Yaksa cult in Early India, the need to label a sculpture shows the intention to inform the literate viewer as to who the depicted deity was. Clearly then, these were not easily recognised deities within the community for who this Stupa was built. Can one then, by corollary assume that the lack of a need to label the iconography on the terracottas, in addition to the profusion of these plaques, shows how easily recognisable and deeply anchored they were in contemporary society? I appreciate that this is an over-simplification; there need not be only one motive behind labelling a sculpture. Perhaps, they were reminders for the sculptors, who marked what they had to carve on each block following instructions of the designers. Also, the lack of labels on the terracotta may be on account of the fact that they are household items, with a smaller sculptural surface packed with details with little space for inscriptions.

Recent research on Buddhist reliquaries and inscriptions on the early 'Mathura' images has found that there was a strong culture of filial piety, ancestor worship and relic veneration: all within a broader context of mortuary practices, that engendered the most visible form of the religion. Not only were the stupa and its relics a manifestation of the worship of a departed soul, a sizeable number of the earliest Buddhist inscriptions on sculptures carry dedicatory inscriptions that say they were donated for the benefit of both the monk who commissioned the image, and his ancestors.[34] The inscriptions also say that the images were donated as an act of *pūjā*, or common ritual offering. Further, not only are the inscriptions found on images of the Buddha, they can also be found on other objects like pillars, donated for similar reasons.[35] The nature of these inscriptions is based on one central religious premise, that an act of donation and worship, can be undertaken by an individual in order to transfer its merit to another (usually his parents, dead or alive). Considering the weight of the evidence cited by Schopen in this regard, it is not unreasonable to assume that similar motivations may underlie the production of terracotta images by those either unable to afford stone, or not Buddhist by persuasion. The most overwhelming evidence that such doctrines and practices were known even in the period when the terracotta plaques were produced, comes from the more recently read inscriptions (dated to Late-Maurya and Śunga periods) from contemporary Buddhist structures in Pauni, Bharhut and Sri Lanka.[36]

But where could this common practice of dedicating images and pillars by individuals as an act of worship have come from? It certainly finds no canonical warrant in the early Buddhist literature. Here, once again, the terracotta imagery might hold some clues. Is it at all unreasonable to see in so widespread a cult of images of clay – commonly produced, fashioned with suspension holes to be carefully placed and easily dedicated – similar

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[34] I cite three inscriptions from a list selected by Schopen. "This is the gift of the monk Buddhapāla (which is made) as an act of *Puja* for his parents and all beings." "(This is) the gift of the monk .... Mitra... may it be an act of Puja for his deceased parents. May it also be for the granting of health to his companion Dharmadeva." "...on this date an image of the Blessed One Śākyamuni was set up by the Monk Buddhavarman for the worship of all Buddhists. Through this religious gift may his Preceptor Sanghadāsa attain *nirvāna* (may it also be) for the cessation of all suffering of his parents..." Schopen, G.: 1997: pp. 35 – 36.

[35] *Op. cit.* p. 36.

motivations? This is not to say that the rationale behind ALL the terracotta images is founded in the 'transfer of merit', but only that a precedent for making images of personalised deities, enshrined, invested with superhuman qualities had already been established in terracotta. The form of the plaques themselves must be considered, to show how they were used and the sorts of context in which they were used. That the deities in the terracotta were ritually propitiated and beseeched for favours is perfectly clear from the images themselves.[37] Considering their form and wide availability, the plaques might have served the function of being votive offerings and dedications. At the same time, it is likely, they performed a more apotropaic or talismanic function. Still other moulded terracottas, probably had nothing at all to do with religious practices, but that their imagery was conditioned by what their contemporary culture considered fanciful, extraordinary, mythical, is borne out by the pieces themselves. Just as contemporary Buddhists donated images of either the Yakshas who had been absorbed into their faith, or subsequently of their seer, the Buddha, it is possible that the followers of the cult of the goddess with weapon shaped hairpins and winged deities followed similar practices. Evidence for this is more than just circumstantial, and some of the arguments, circuitous as they are, are outlined below.

In the following discussion, I will attempt to piece together the specific forces that might have created these images, the impulse to depict the specific attributes associated with the icons encountered (mostly in terracotta), and the importance of trying to reconstruct the nature of the rituals that informed their use, from the second century BC to the first century AD. The first hurdle to be overcome is the immediate tendency of modern scholarship to create watertight categories: 'Indian', 'religious', 'ritual', 'Brahmanic' or 'Buddhist' being the ones that affect us most here.

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[36] *op. cit.* p. 42. He further shows that the doctrine of the transfer of merit was not just a Mahayana innovation, but in actual fact, one known better from the early Hinayana tradition.

[37] The plaques are replete, as we have seen in Chapter 3, with scenes of worshippers collected at the shrine of the goddess who are either being blessed by the deity, making offerings to her, or receiving coins from her.

A crucial piece of archaeological information links the iconography of the terracotta goddesses with the mortuary cult of the stupa. Fig. 2.15a is a small gold repoussé plaque that shows the goddess with weapons in her hair, that was discovered in the reliquary of one of the pre-Buddhist stupas at Lauriya Nandangarh.[38] She is iconographically similar to the goddess ubiquitous in terracotta. The cult of the *stupa*, we are aware, is fundamentally one that is related to prevalent beliefs about death and the afterlife, an idea that seems to have become one of the important aspects of Buddhist religious practice in Mauryan and post-Mauryan India. In its absorption by the Buddhists, this idea was extended to imply the veneration of the relics of the Buddha or members of his *sangha*. The relics of the Buddha took the place of whatever may have been deposited in the *stupa* earlier, and were worshipped, just as the earlier stupas must have been. There may well have been some differences in the nature of that worship, but that is immaterial at this point. Not only does the Buddha take the place of the *Cakravartin*, he becomes the living energy within the *stupa*. There would naturally little room in the reliquary devoted to him for some other cult goddess, like fig. 2.15 a, b or 2.16 which were obviously interred with the remains of some important personages at an earlier date. Examples of this sort are rare, and yet they are compelling pieces of evidence for the parentage of the Buddhists' elaborate practices surrounding the stupa, its rituals and notions of the transference of the merit. Undoubtedly, with greater exploration in the field, more examples of this sort will come to light.

The Buddhists were not exclusively Buddhist. At the risk of sounding clichéd, when it comes to the study of religious practice in India, religious boundaries imposed by a theological elite have seldom withheld individuals from participating in or seeking favour / and good wishes from anything else that purports to be sacred. The donations of the sculptures and early Buddhist structures, contemporary with the terracotta studied here, were not made exclusively by Buddhists. Curiously some important facts in the nature of this patronage have been glossed over. For instance, a donative inscription in a Buddhist monastery says that it was let by a female Brahmin, while the royal inscription at the Buddhist monasteries at Nasik says

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[38] The image has been discussed in Chapter 2.

that the king had 10,000 Brahmins fed and prevented the mixing of castes.[39] Buddhism may have held an academic theological appeal that reacted to 'Vedic' ritualism, but in practice, it lived within its own framework of liturgy, festival and ritual that accompany any major religion. It also attracted a wide audience, who saw benefit in donating auspicious gifts to seek benefit and religious merit for their ancestors and their future generations. Buddhism itself was not just about the philosophy elaborated in its texts. It was a faith that was *practised* by individuals, who also participated within the broader milieu in which they lived. *Pūjā*, ritual, worship, festivals, were common forms of worship, no wonder the early Buddhists took them on. Just as the Upaniṣads found few practitioners of its exertions on realising the true nature of *ātman* and *brahman*, surely Buddhist doctrines of *citta* and *manas* and *anātta* were equally reserved for the select few.

Evidence for early Indian ritual, mythology, superstition, folklore and performing arts are scarce: these are traditions seldom set in stone (!). But in the relief imagery of the Buddhists and others of this period, we get a glimpse of what they might have entailed, and in both cases, their images use a common lexicon and depict similar things. In this regard, two aspects need further elaboration. First, what was the nature of the world of the *Yakṣas / Nāgas / ganas* who were known to have been widely used by the Buddhists and others? Any information on their folklore and the practices surrounding their worship would not be unknown to the culture of the individuals who used terracotta images. Second, what are the sources available to reconstruct the nature of early worshipful practices? In appreciating the vital role of drama, festival and performance in not just ritual, but by extension, the need and use for images, we may be able to contextualise the repeated reference to such practices in the terracotta themselves.

YAKSAS AND OTHER INDIGENOUS BELIEF SYSTEMS

In his seminal study on *Yakṣas*, Coomaraswamy has shown that references to them abound even in the early Brahmanical literature of the *Rg Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, *Brāhmanas, Upaniṣads*,

and *Grhya Sutras*.[40] While the etymological origins of the word are uncertain, *Yakṣas* can refer from the earliest available literature onwards to something wonderful or terrible. There can be discerned a simultaneously dual attitude of fear, dislike and that of respect. From Coomaraswamy's list of references to *Yakṣas* in early Vedic (*Rg Vedic*) literature, the word '*Yakṣa*' often seems to be used in a disparaging sense and the worship of these demigods considered abhorrent. At other times, it is clear that they are to be placated. Such a dual portrayal may be on account of two reasons. First, that the *Yakṣas* themselves were, by their very nature simultaneously benevolent and malevolent, treading an intermediary path between gods (*devas*) and spirits (or *bhūtas* and *pretas*), where these powerful beings had to be appeased and propitiated to assure their followers of their continued protection and benefaction. There is at the same time perhaps, a second reason. Embedded in the myths of these *Yakṣas* may lie evidence that betrays the strains that existed between the orthodox among the Vedic followers and the more animistic indigenous worshippers of *Yakṣas*, explaining their dual nature. This might also explain why *Yakṣas* are called Gods of the evildoers and robbers, and also why they are clubbed at times in Brahmanic literature with *Rākṣasas* and *Bhūtas*.[41]

By the later Vedic *Atharva Veda* passages, *Yakṣas* are invoked in the same breath as the other gods. Similarly in the *Gopatha Brāhmana* I,1 and in the *Taittareya Brāhmana* 3,12,3,I, *Brahman* says that "by concentrating energy (*tapas*) I become the primal *Yakṣa*." In these later Vedic references we thus witness other important changes. Early Vedic exclusivity and preference for its 'Aryan' gods had given way to a language where later Vedic ideas seek to define themselves in *Yakṣa* terms. This is why *Brahman* says that he becomes the Primal *Yakṣa*. Or, as in the *Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* 5,4, another similar quotation reads, "He who knows the great *Yakṣa* as the primal born, that is, the Brahma, is the real; he conquers these

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[39] Referred to by Dehejia, V.,1996: pp. xii- xiv

[40] Coomaraswamy, AK, 1928(b): p.5 and addenda to part I.

[41] Coomaraswamy compares this with the fate of the Devas at the hands of Zoroaster or that of the older European mythology under the influence of Christianity, *ibid.* p. 4.

worlds." An important verse from the *Atharva Veda* which not only pre-empts the Upaniṣadic focus on *ātman – brahman*, but also seeks to define it in terms of *Yakṣas*, calls the indwelling spirit of the self of man *ātmanvat Yakṣa*. "The lotus flower of nine gates veiled only by the three qualities (*gunas*), what self like *Yakṣa* dwells therein, that (only) the *Brahman* knowers know."[42] Another reference Coomaraswamy lists from the *Kena* 3 (15) and the *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad* IV (20) recounts an incident when *brahman* revealed himself to those who did not know him. Surprised, *Brahman's* audience asked, "what *Yakṣa* is this?" This understanding and defining of later Vedic and Upaniṣadic ideas like *brahman* in terms of and in relation to *Yakṣas* shows how the latter were a commonly held language of ideas even before the post-Aśokan period, being received by a variety of literary works more favourably at some instances than at others.

Still later, by the period of the Buddhist texts and in art, *Yakṣas* became a commonly used concept, used even as an honorific before most divinities. This amalgamation and acceptance of one system by another had obviously started in the late Vedic period. Certainly by the period of the epics (at least the *Rāmāyana*) which were probably already composed in a time roughly contemporary with post-Mauryan India, *Yakṣas* were familiar characters: A part of the shared tradition of the Indic peoples. It is against this backdrop that we must situate the imagery of post-Mauryan India.

Although the dates of the earliest *Yakṣa* and *Yakṣī* images are contentious[43], it is clear that images of the cult must have been prevalent in post-Mauryan India if not earlier. While most

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[42] Coomaraswamy, AK, 1928 (b): p.5 and addenda to part I, p.3.

[43] See for instance some of the debates surrounding the Didarganj *cauri* bearer. Coomaraswamy:1928 (b), VS Agrawala 1965, SP Gupta 1980, Rekha Morris 1989, pp. 77-81, and recently, Asher and Spink: 1990: *Ars orientalis* 19: pp. 1 25. KP Jayaswal, 1937, tried to suggest that the Parkham statue was of Kunika Ajatshatru, dating it to the sixth century BC, this has since been refuted, and the date brought to the third – second century BC. While these scholars date the sculpture on the basis of its subject matter, style and polish, between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC, others prefer a date between the 1st to 2nd centuries AD. Some of the scholars who hold the latter view are Ray, NR 1975, pp.37-4; Schlumberger, Daniel, 1988: p.9-14; SK Saraswati, 1957 and JC Harle, 1986, (second edn. 1994 / 1997).
This debate is part of a wider one about whether the other early Yaksha statues are Mauryan or post-Mauryan. See, Pramod Chandra, "Yaksha and Yaksi Images from Vidisa" and Moti Chandra, 1952-53.

of the early examples are monumental free standing monoliths[44], they also surround, as already mentioned, the earliest Buddhist Stupas, and some authors have also linked the cult with the small nude steatopygous ladies on 'Mauryan' ring stones.[45] Unfortunately, we have few clear or codified iconographic descriptions for them that survive, except that we know them to be robust and earthy, corpulent and regal. They are often found associated with *cauris* (fly whisks) and *chhatris* (parasols) that are usually held by sensuous bejewelled attendants, who may themselves be *Yakṣīs*. Though there are some vivid textual descriptions of these figures in Buddhist and Jain sources, we can not date those texts to Mauryan or Śunga dates with certainty. A few are labelled in the reliefs of Bharhut and other Buddhist structures. These are however, only a few of the countless types of *Yakṣas*, many were local to only a particular village, which were never canonised. It would not therefore be surprising, given both the popularity and the nature of these demigods, if some of the figures in terracotta are informed by the cult(s) of *Yakṣas*.

Yakṣas are usually still to be found as attendants, guardians or gate keepers. *Kubera*, their chief is known by many names including *Vaiṣravana*, *Jambhala*, *Pāñcika* etc. He can be a *Lokapāla*, or a directional deity, usually associated with the North and at times with the East, but mostly *Kubera* is known as the *Yakṣa* worshipped for wealth and productivity. In his city Alaka on Mount Kailaśa, he is attended by *Manibhadra* and countless other *Yakṣas*, *Kinnaras*, *Gandharvas*, *Munis* and *Rākṣasas*. This is significant as we have here in other words, an entire corps of semi-divine beings who inhabit Alakapuri. The resemblance of this category of figures with those in terracotta is further evidenced in many other specific examples. *Kubera* is known to be pot-bellied and is most commonly shown squatting, holding a small purse in one hand, an image that finds repeated reference in post-Mauryan terracotta. Similarly, there are a number of demonic figures in the terracotta, associated no doubt once again with *Yakṣa* and *bhūta*, the complimentary categories of divinities. Particularly telling of *Yakṣa* parentage also, are reliefs that show (what have been called) 'abduction' scenes. In their role as giants,

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[44] Like the Yakshas and Yakshis from Besnagar, Parkham, Patna and Didarganj.

dwarves or half-humans, *Yakṣas* were capable of either abducting beautiful women for pleasure, children for sacrifice (usually to ward off illness), or perform their role as intermediaries, carrying spirits through their world which was between the world of men and of gods. Whether winged celestial *gandharvas* associated with music and performance, directional deities, door guardians, half human – half animal (like the horse headed *Assa-mukhi Yakkhini*[46] on the medallions of Buddhist sites – fig. 3.316) beings or figures closely associated with water and foliage... the *yakṣas* occupy an intermediary status between godly and human[47]. Moreover, they display an iconography similar to what is also seen in post-Mauryan terracotta. Other factors also relate the terracotta images to *Yakṣas*. Usually, they are found in what is a subordinate, or perhaps better classified as supportive class of divinities: garland bearers, celestial musicians, atlantes etc. Coomaraswamy, Misra,[48] Sutherland[49] and others have remarked that though *Yakṣas* were accepted in this depotentiated, semi-divine state by post-Mauryan Buddhists, they might have held a more elevated position prior to that, particularly in the minds of those who were not Vedic, Upaniṣadic renunciates or Buddhists.[50]That the figures in terracotta betray a flavour akin to these *Yakṣas* known to us so far mostly from Jain and Buddhist textual contexts,[51] should not surprise us. In addition, that they do not exactly mirror the ones on Buddhist structures is also not surprising as in the Buddhist context they have been tamed to a position where they may be used to elevate the status of the Buddha embodied in the relics / *stupa* which they surround.

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[45] Discussed in greater detail below.

[46] Known to us from the *Padakusalamanara Jataka.*

[47] According to Coomaraswamy these figures can all be looked upon as Yakshas, 1928(b), p.10.

[48] Misra, R. N.: 1981: pp. 104 – 144.

[49] Sutherland, G. H.: 1991.

[50] This is of course well known though not just the visual imagery being considered here but has compelling textual basis as well, especially in accounts of the Buddha's visit to Sri Lanka and the dispelling of the local Yakshas. During his first visit to the island, nine months after his enlightenment the Buddha "tamed the Yakshas" (*"yakkhadamanam", Dipavamsa,* I.81) and thereby removed all fear from the minds of the people, making the island inhabitable and thus, also brought his compassion to bear on the Yakshas (after having conquered them through his extraordinary powers).

[51] Repeated references to Yakshas are known in Jain Puranas, see Coomaraswamy,1928 (b). JP Sharma: 1989.

Still more important for our purposes however, is the oft-quoted argument that these *Yakṣas* and *Yakṣīs* are, as Sutherland says, "a shorthand lexicon of images" that, "entailed a freedom of thematic association that permitted ever widening circles of conceptual relationship, in which pre-Buddhist mythological figures such as the *Yakṣa* became vital elements in the redrawn map of Buddhist mythology and narrative."[52] Further, these forms exceeded their purely decorative function by acquiring and generating a symbolism that is capable of standing on its own, both aesthetically and theologically. This symbol creates a morphological resemblance that allows it to link and translate different systems or schools of ideas into each other's language by being a common mode of perceiving loaded and incremental meaning that is "endemic to the self-expression of the culture."[53] Sutherland is not alone in these conclusions. As she says, Coomaraswamy had alluded to this earlier.[54] What is significant for our purposes here is that if the language of symbolism evidenced in the relatively few stone *Yakṣas* and *Yakṣīs* can be taken as signifiers "endemic to the self expression of the culture" then, surely the perhaps still earlier, and definitely thousands more terracotta plaques, which employ a clear and common language of symbols are also worthy of that status.

However the more relevant reason for appreciating the effect of the cult of the *Yakṣas* to subsequent Indian religious imagery is seeing how they might have transformed or been appropriated. This is not always easily possible, and once again, our information will have to be carefully constructed. The *Yakṣas* and their related pantheon inhabit a sacred space, they are also often associated with specific directions, attitudes and myths. The nature of their myths and function is often uncannily similar to the class of minor divinities in the subsequent Brahmanic tradition. That is, if we explore the specific myths of the *ganas* of Shiva, the directional and planetary deities, the gods associated with specific diseases in the *'Ayurvedic'* sections of the *Samhitas* or those that appear in one's dreams, there appears a complex set of

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[52] GH Sutherland: 1991: p.14.

[53] *Ibid.* p.8

[54] See Coomaraswamy, 1928 (b) and 1956; Sutherland, 1991 p.20.

related divine beings that perform a role and appear just as the Yakshas do. Most importantly, their descriptions create a visual image that is remarkably similar to both the early terracotta and stone sculptures. Few studies of these minor divinities have been conducted, and virtually none exist which applies these texts to post-Mauryan terracotta. A fact that is hardly surprising, since scholarship is already burdened with the mysteries of the imagery of the 'major' Indian divinities. In this regard however, the contributions of two scholars must be noted. Following the work of Coomaraswamy cited above, the most recent and thorough treatment of the subject of the changing nature of the *Yakṣas*, their intimate relationship with *Nāgas*, *gandharvas* and others and the copious textual references to them have been studied by RN Misra.[55] A few tentative suggestions, some new and others based on the studies of these scholars, can, I feel, be made.

The entire pantheon of divine figures referred to here are not the major gods Shiva, Vishnu and Devi, but lie either embedded in their complex mythologies or in ritual and liturgical works as minor divinities. Often they are mentioned as divinities subjugated or in the service of other more widely known figures. In his study on the 'Roots of Ayur Veda' Wujastyk considers sections of the *Kaśyapa Samhita* that refer to several supernatural beings who are responsible for causing specific diseases and ailments.[56] By extension, their worship, or propitiation, allays their malevolent effect. One such goddess who is recognised by her splendid wings, excessive and fine jewellery and crowns is known to harm those women who kill birds. She has the ability to change her form, and appears as any of the elements she is associated with – fish, bird, snake or plant. She is herself of the *bhūta / preta* type i.e. a spirit of the vengeful dead. She can, therefore turn demonic in some of her manifestations and be seen with fangs, ugly and fierce. Further, she is known to appear in one's dreams. Similarly, another such figure is supposed to harm those people who indulge in sexual activity in the wrong time or place. In the event that she appears in a woman's dreams, the affected woman's home will be driven to penury and lose all its cattle. An image not unlike the goddess figures seen in the terracottas

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[55] Misra, RN: 1981.

so far, who often has large ornate wings on her shoulders, is associated with foliage, fish, elaborate hairdos, jewellery and crowns and moreover, is seen to bestow coins to her acolytes.

Similarly, the *Mahābhārata* has repeated references to these figures. In the section pertaining to the birth of *Skanda-Kārtikeya*, the sage *Mārkandeya* recounts the story of how the *dānava Keśin* intent on raping *Devasenā* had abducted her, as he had her sister *Daityasenā*. However, while *Daityasenā* was happy to remain with *Keśin*, *Devasenā* beseeched Indra for help. A brief battle between the crowned and club bearing *Keśin* and the thunder-bolt wielding Indra followed, which the latter won. *Devasenā*, it seems, was pre-ordained to be rescued as she was meant to marry *Skanda-Kārtikeya*. The narrative then goes into a long sequence of events that relate the birth of *Skanda* through a complex story of the collection of *Agni's* seed on six occasions by *Svāhā*. Disguised as the beautiful wives of the seers, *Svāhā* both seduces *Agni*, who she has been longing for, and fulfils his lust for the wives of the seers. She carries his seed, and this may be significant, as a *garuda* or mythical bird, to a mountain populated by other *nāgas* and demonic creatures where it develops into the six-headed *Skanda*. When the valour and strength of this child become known, even the mighty Indra pays homage to him. At this stage, four sets of mothers lay claim to him. *Svāhā*, the women who she was meant to be but was not, *Garuda*- the carrier of the seed – again whose form *Svāhā* had assumed and all the *Mātrikas* or mothers who had been collectively ordered to garner their unbeatable forces to rid the world of this child. Seeing his orphaned plight and fearful of his pure power the latter became his 'adoptive' mothers and nurtured him. *Skanda* accepted all four claimants as his mothers, and granted to them their wishes. Herein lies, for our purposes, the most interesting part of the narrative. One group of the mothers wished to be accorded the status that was enjoyed by certain other female demonesses of the devourers of foetuses and children. *Skanda* granted them the role of afflicters of various diseases and madnesses that may affect male children until the age of sixteen, and so ensured that they would enjoy the constant devotion and worship of the concerned families. Similarly, other divinities that

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[56] Wujastyk, Dominik, 1998: pp. 207 - 235. Further references to the Kaśyapa Samhita can be found in Tiwari, JN: 1985: p. 5.

had issued from *Skanda* were sanctioned the same right, with the only difference being that they should afflict adult males until they were seventy! The narrative carries on to mention the methods that should be employed in order to propitiate the potent forces *Skanda* had created, these included elaborate *pujas*, offerings of flowers and incense, gifts and oblations. [57]

This myth encapsulates elements of the nature of the intimate relationship between one set of gods and pre-existing divinities, the dual role of fierce divinities simultaneously granting the very objects they were created to destroy, the modes of worship founded in both Vedic ritualism (with references to *Soma* and *Agni*) and a personalised devotional worship. The *Mātrikas*, many with Vedic names, aspire here, as they clearly state, to a status already occupied by others they claimed had been "fabricated as the mothers of the world", so that they may have the same power and enjoy the same homage paid to these pre-existing figures.[58]

This myth, like the cases from the *Samhitas* cited above, is not exceptional in any way. These elements of the narrative can be extrapolated from scores of other examples in every body of Ancient Indian literature.[59] Their myths can either hide behind those of Shiva in the form of his *ganas*, as the *Mātrikas* related to Devi, as the gods of disease in the medical treatises or in later Buddhist and Jain literature. The *Yakṣas* are consistently related to the worlds of the *gandharva*, *Apsaras*, *dānava*, *graha rākṣasa*, *bhūta*, *preta* and *piṣācha* in the texts. Together

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[57] Mahabharata, 3.207 – 220 (transl. van Buitenen: 1975: pp. 640-660).

[58] For a comparison see *Pañchavimśa Brāhmana* XIX.3.1 (Gandharvas and Apsaras are worshipped for granting offspring) or the Rig veda 10.162 where Gandharvas seduce women and rob them of their foetuses. Compare also the myth of the all to well known Pūtana in the Harivamsa Purana who assumes beautiful maternal forms in order to be able to kill children. She is also at times part bird. The goddess Suskarevati, another such figure features in the Kaśyapa Samhita, Astangarhdaya Samgraha of Vagabhata and in the Matsya Purana (Ch. 179) in the myth of Andhaka, who is again a disease casing goddess, who when worshipped becomes a child granting one. In his translation of the myth of Revatī from the *Kaśyapasamhita*, Tiwari says, " *Revatī* appears not as an afflicter of human beings but, on the contrary, as a goddess who, on the instructions of *Skanda Kārtikeya*, protects them against afflictions by other evil beings. She is said to be of many forms, *Bahū-rūpa*, but her principal form is *Jāta-hārinī* (foetus stealer), and, in fact, the two names, *Revatī* and *Jāta-hārinī*, are indiscriminately used throughout this section of the text to denote the same goddess. It is also said that *Revati-Jāta-hārinī* is of three types, divine, human and pertaining to the animal world, and pervades the animal world in her various forms. She is *Sarva-loka-bhayankārī* (universally dreaded) and revered even by the gods for the growth and long life of progeny." – Tiwari, JN.: 1985: p. 5.

[59] See the copious textual references in Misra: 1981.

these creatures / divinities form a kindred group notorious for both seducing humans and destroying offspring, for afflicting illness and then alleviating them. They are known also to be related to specific places, planets,[60] directions, to be frequently associated with music, dance and festivity.

Zysk's study of early Buddhist medical literature as practised by the monks finds remarkably close parallels between Buddhist and other Ancient Indian texts in the sections pertaining to gynaecology and children's diseases in the *Kaśyapa Samhita*, *Bhela* and *Caraka Samhita*. Moreover, he is able to demonstrate how the rise of the healing arts was linked with the development of the various *śramana* sects. References to the physician-monks of these sects from Indian, Chinese and Greek sources are collated by him. "From the early Vedic period medicine and healers were excluded from the core of the orthodox brahmanic social and religious hierarchy and found acceptance among the heterodox traditions of mendicant ascetics, or *śramanas*, who became the repository of a vast storehouse of medical knowledge."[61] He further finds a shift from a magico-religious medicine to a more empirico-rational one taking place in the period we are addressing. The magico-religious nature of medicine was characterised by demon-caused diseases and magical rituals involving the recitation of charms and, (this may be significant) the application of efficacious amulets to exorcise demons and ward off further attacks. Moreover, Zysk finds an elaborate and related pantheon of divinities in the medical literature of the *Atharvaveda* with their independent mythologies, separate from the evolution of the major Vedic gods. The recounting of their myths formed an essential part of the healing ritual itself. Significantly, although many branches of Indian medicine were known to undergo further changes at the hands of the empiricist *śramanas*, in the realm of the elimination of malevolent entities, the cures for

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[60] For a recent study of the development of the planetary deities, their link with constellations, *grahas* and by extension, other directional, minor and major gods, see Markel, S. 1995, pp. 135 – 175. Significantly, he finds correspondences between the *grahas* and disease afflicting gods and goddesses, already mentioned above.

[61] See Zysk, Kenneth J. 1998: pp. 30 – 32, 67, 118-119.

pregnant women and childhood diseases, the magico-religious nature of early medicine continued to survive.[62]

Festival, Ritual Performance and Epic Narrative

Festivities, involving the performance of epic narratives, folklore, myths, accompanied by music, dance, drama and discourse formed an integral part of Indian ritual expression. However, by their very nature, folklore and performances inhabit a realm that is simultaneously ritualistic, involving, participatory and at times not necessarily religious. Making distinctions between religious and secular expressions is therefore difficult, and neither is it necessary. My concern here is to first, try and account for the popularity of scenes of festivities in post-Mauryan terracotta, second, to appreciate the role and contexts of some these festivities in the social history of the period. Thirdly, to supplement the lines of enquiry on the nature of worship and function of imagery initiated above, by reconstructing aspects of the nature of the peoples' religious and other practices.

[62] Zysk: 1998: 13 – 20 and Zysk 1985: 1-11, 39-40, 72-74, 97-98.

Festivities were held under a variety of contexts, one of them being where they were part of the imperial collective agency that organised festivals around the Buddhist *stupa* cult (that may have had imperial designs in their agenda, and promotion of the Buddha's biography) at that time.[63] At the same time, they were an effective tool to be used by dynasts only because of their popularity. In this regard, their many depictions on Buddhist stupas, as pointed out by Huntington and others, testifies to the important role they played as a means of veneration. They were also, therefore, an active part local folk cults and rituals, some of these above aspects are elaborated here.[64]

I agree with the general principle supported by Huntington that post-Aśokan ritual enactments of stories related to the historical Buddha need to be re-evaluated especially in regard to the whole nature of their depiction in plastic form since it provides more conclusive evidence for reconstructing contemporary popular religious practice. I do not however, believe this is opposed to the idea of "aniconism". Ritual festivals with the performance of music and drama, masked-dance and recitation of texts, in a society which strongly believes in a world of magic, genii, *Yakṣas*, *rākṣasas* and spirits – don't merely re-enact incidents, but invest those performances with a repossession of divinity and sanctify it. What is to us a mere depiction of an empty space under some chosen tree during a ritual commemorating the time when the Buddha himself sat under it, or even if merely an 'aniconic' depiction of the moment the Buddha achieved enlightenment, must have to the original audience at the performance served to remind them of that moment by *becoming* that moment.[65]

It is indeed likely that other great narratives, like the epics (at least the *Rāmāyana* is said to have been composed by this period) or other local *Yakṣa* festivals with performances must

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[63] See Walters, *op. Cit.* pp. 21-22, 36; Trainor, *op. cit.* p.156.

[64] In addition to the many sculptural reliefs discusses more commonly, the following can also be included to show scenes of ritual / festive performance: Bharhut : (Sivaramamurti, 1971, pl. 1; BM Barua: 1934 and 37: pl. xxxix, fig. 34), Sanchi: (Marshall and Foucher : 1942: vol 3, pl. xviii), Ranigumpha cave Orissa, Cave 10 at Ajanta which has painted references to such scenes (G. Yazdani, 1960, vol. VII – XI, p. 779)

[65] Many recent writings on Buddhology take this view. As a matter of interest regarding the Bodhi tree, Walters quotes from the Dhajadayaka Thera, "As though face to face with the Buddha I worshipped the unexcelled Bodhi tree" [*sammukhaa viya sambuddham avandim bodhim uttamam*], *op. Cit.* pp. 34.

have been held.[66] In his work on Ancient Indian folk cults, Agrawala describes that with the growing interaction between the peoples of different cultic affiliations in this period it becomes difficult to determine what originates where. At the same time, some information on 'folk' cults and the festivals that continued to remain popular, and which perhaps accrued further meanings or some transformation in affiliation are mentioned in Buddhist literature. For example the festivities associated with the cult of the pillar of Indra or *Indradhvaja* are called *Indramahā*. In Buddhist and Jain literature it is called *Indamahā* or Festival of Indra. There are many other similar festivals or *mahās* mentioned in the texts including both Buddhist and Brahmanic ones like *Rukkhamahā - Vrikshamahā* (festival of the tree); *Girimahā* (festival of the mountain); *Nadīmahā* (festival of the river); *Thumbhamahā-Stupamahā* (festival of the *stupa*) and *Nāgamahā* (festival of Serpent). The *mahās* were also called *samājas* and these festivals were accompanied with much celebration. Very often animal sacrifices were made. Dance and drama formed a part of these festivities.[67] A picture not unlike the depiction of the numerous processions of dancers and musicians, of figures bearing food and garlands with caparisoned elephants and horses and masked dancers which are frequently found in terracotta.

More than the festivals to Indra and the stupa, it is the ritual processions and performances that surround the other 'minor' deities that are likely to mirror depictions on the plaques. Again, the texts are replete with references to Yakshas and *gandharvas* not just enjoying fine music, fragrance and drink, they are themselves proficient practitioners of the arts. Till today *gandharvas* and *kinnaras* are the deities of music, constantly referred to by musicians and

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[66] Walters, [*op. Cit.* pp. 21-22, 36] says that the Buddhist Apadana, Buddhavamsa and Cariyapitaka style of narrative betrays its performative nature, and that, given their dating, he says that these are "prototypes for the Indian Epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*". Given the fact that there is no conclusive way to date either the Buddhist texts he considers in his article or the other Indian Epic literature, I feel it is premature to call one a 'prototype'. He says that the Epics emerged in the Gupta period, this conventional view, is of course known to not be entirely correct. While the commonly held recentions of the epics in the Sanskritic traditions are known to betray Gupta and post-Gupta interpolations, the earliest segments of both epics can certainly be dated to post-Aśokan Śunga India. It therefore fits perfectly within the worldview of that period. Further, just as he has employed an interdisciplinary study as a method to contextualise the *stupa* and its carvings; we can further that paradigm to include the meagre information we have on other non-Buddhist festivals to try and create a similar integral backdrop against which the not-necessarily-Buddhist imagery (like the terracotta of that period) may fit.

[67] VS Agrawala, 1970.

performers across India, it is therefore not surprising that they should be seen here associated with these icons.

In his study on the origins of the fatalist doctrine of the Ājīvikas, Basham says[68] that at the time of Mahāvīra, "Magadhans were famous bards who sang martial songs out of which the Epic tradition grew at the courts of chieftains all over Āryavarta. Makkhali Gosala (the founder of Ājivikism) was according to the Jain story, a Mankha.[69] Hemachandra equates this word with 'Magadha', a bard.[70] Thus a very slender chain of relations connects the founder of Ājivikism with the Aryan fatalist tradition, and this determinism may in part have been inspired by ideas derived from the renegade Aryan singers of martial songs."[71] Basham also lists other 'non-Aryan' sources for the origins of Ājivikism. For our purposes however, it is relevant to note that the fatalism and pre-destined action that is also exhibited in the epic tradition, would have been an integrated part of the contemporary psyche. This epic tradition was by its very nature, transmitted mostly through music, dance and performance. Basham says that this tradition of the epics might have helped give Ājivikism its central tenet of determinism (*Niyati*). If the power of performance, to make an audience participate in it is strong enough to influence the inception of the very kernel of a religion, we must acknowledge that it can certainly accomplish the more modest goal of creating anthropomorphic figures; particularly figures, which portray a world as we have seen of epic heroes, of semi-divine *Yakṣas* and *Yakṣīs*, of dancerly maidens and demonic giants. I do not wish to imply that post-Mauryan iconography is solely a result of narrative / epic performances, only that it was one of the important contributing factors in the creation of early Indian iconography.

Basham also refers to *Abhayadeva*, who mentions that there are two paths (*māgga*) to deliverance, music and dance. Two of the eight finalities of the Ājīvikas are said to be *carime*

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[68] Basham, AL, 1951: p.8.

[69] Buddhists give a different account of Makkhali Gosala, their founder's opponent.

[70] Later Basham gives diverse meanings of the word mankha: It could also mean one who draws pictures. "It is not impossible that mankha fulfilled both functions of an exhibitor of religious pictures and a singer of religious songs." Basham, *op. Cit.* p. 35.

geye and *carime natte*, or, song and dance. Gosala himself is said to have sung and danced in his last delirium just before his passing. "From these injunctions we infer that singing and dancing played an important part in Ājīvika religious practice. Possibly the Ājīvikas in their *Ajiviya-sabhā* held meetings for ecstatic religious singing and dancing..."[72]

Further, because many of these images actually show scenes of music and dance, we should not make the mistake of labelling them all as 'secular'. It is well known from cultures across the world that performances are often sacred. In many traditions, including some in India, the protagonist is possessed by the divinity that he portrays. His audience's interaction with him is like witnessing divinity itself, a sentiment akin to what is also felt when people interact with images, where the image is living and the worshipper is in a sense "meeting God".[73] In this regard it is also worth mentioning two other texts, the *Nātya śāstra* and Patañjali's *Yoga sutra* which have both been dated to a period broadly contemporary with the terracotta studied here. References are also available from Kautilya, along with other Jain, Buddhist and Epic works to dramatic performances.[74]

The *Nātya śāstra* is known to be a key text for the understanding of all Indian arts. While its dating is contentious, it was probably composed by the second century AD, if not earlier. Apart from its invaluable references to sculpture, icons, the arts of painting and performance, it provides a theoretical thread that interconnects all Indian art. Its discourse on the emotion or sentiment created when a spectator interacts with divinity or with art, or the *'ānanda'* experienced as a result of the *rasānubhava,* proves beyond doubt the philosophical underpinning and special place that the arts, (including icons), occupy in interacting between man and the impersonal divinity.[75] There are much broader theoretical arguments as well

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[71] Basham, *op. Cit.* p.8.

[72] *ibid.* p. 116-117. Basham equtes the Ajivikas with the Caitanyas who in later times had similar practises.

[73] "Meeting god" is a phrase I owe to Stephen Huyler's exhibition and catalogue.

[74] Even in the Ashtadhyayi of Panini, a text which relatively less controversial to date to our period, there are references to Natasutras. See Byrski, M. Ch. 1974-5 and Agrawala, VS: 1953: pp. 338 – 339.

which can help us support this view of the importance of performance. In a study on the link between ritual and drama, Natalia Lidova reexamines the *Nātya śāstra* to make links between Vedic *yajña*, personalised *pūjā*, ritual performance and performing art. She further shows how the consecrated playhouse was a temple, the performance a ritual of enormous importance for the well-being of the king, the gods and country. She analyses different types of nātakas (dramas): the *dhima*, *ihamaga* and the *samavakara* types, which she says are staged versions of Vedic myths. Further, not only are ritual enactments of a drama or myth be recorded on sculpture, there are *Nātya śastric* prescriptions for the construction of the theatre or play-house. These are similar to *Āgamic* prescriptions for the construction of a temple. Whether any temples actually looked like the consecrated spaces mentioned in the texts is questionable, as are issues regarding the nature of liturgical practice. What is of the greatest value for understanding the importance of ritual performance and the rise of anthropomorphic imagery is her analysis of the nature of ritual in the text. The class of deities to be invoked before the curtain rises are *Nāgas*, *Rākṣasas*, *Apsaras*, *Yakṣas* and others of their group.[76] Further, it mentions that an anthropomorphic likeness of the figure worshipped should also be made. Similarly, every stage of the performance, the actors, stagehands, audience and building had to be ritually prepared, for a performance was in itself sacred. Witnessed and sanctioned by the king and priests, deities were invoked into the actors themselves.[77] Naturally, elaborate masks, costumes, musical ensembles, *mudras* and *āsanas* had to be employed by the players. These references are not just important for the superficial resemblance they bear to early Indian imagery,[78] but for another more conceptual reason. Performances, sculpture and the arts had the quality of invoking divinity and becoming themselves divinely charged. For the spectator of this performance, this was an opportunity to witness and identify with that work of 'art' that would bring him as close as possible during his period on earth to a divine

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[75] The numerous expositions on the Rasa theory in Bharata's *Nātya Sastra,* BN Goswamy, BN 1986, pp 17 - 30.; Rangacharya, A. (revised edn. 1996), Nagar, RS (ed.) 1998.

[76] Lidova: 1994: pp- 7-9. Interestingly, the text also mentions that the play-house should be covered by climbing plants, and painted with scenes of men and women in erotic play. Lidova: p. 101.

[77] "During the puja, the performers were supposed to be the closest to the supra-personal world. The ritual replica of the Universe on the stage was considered merged with its cosmic prototype." Lidova: 1994: p.14.

[78] Natya Shastra, Chapters 3 and 23.

experience. The numerous myths, epics and ritual festivals in their performance have the ability to become the iconographically accurate, anthropomorphic manifestation of a deity, no different from the qualities of a consecrated sculpture.

This conflation of the modern contradictions between religious and secular, art and religion may at first seem to not allow for any intelligible reason for the creation and nature of early Indian imagery. However, no one aspect of this question can be answered in an isolated discussion. Images of divinities existed within a ritual framework, rituals were performed, the performers' faith and intensity of devotion forming an under-structure on which a complex arrangement of other artistic manifestations rested. The origin of forms and symbols in the sculpture need not always come from pre-existing sculpture. In seeking the origins of Indian iconography and anthropomorphism, art history will have to look more closely at the general cultural fabric, and examine also the models provided by the realm of the performing arts – their gods, attitudes of worship and mythologies.

THEISM AND BHAKTI

It is widely believed that from the time of the earliest Buddhists, some commonly apprehended forms of worship which were already widespread were being employed to venerate the cult of the Buddha and his *Dharma*. This is most clearly noted in the ancestry of the cult of *stupas* employed for Buddhist purposes which many historians try and trace to as far back as Vedic or even pre-Vedic funerary practices[79]. Whether or not it can be associated with Vedic people or with very ancient non-Vedic burial and ancestral worship, the *stupa* is known to be not a Buddhist invention, and neither is it, in Early-Historic India an architectural

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[79] For a survey / critique of recent literature concerned with the stupa see Robert L. Brown: 1986: 215-232. See also AL Dallapiccola (ed.), 1980, for a broad examination of the stupa. A. Snodgrass 1985: is a complex study of meanings that may accompany a stupa. For more up to date references to the prelevance of mortuary cults in the Deccan that were absorbed by Buddhists see Reddy, KM: 1998: pp. 291 – 295.

form being used by the Buddhists alone.[80] This is backed textually as well, as in the oft-quoted *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra* passage[81] which recounts The Buddha's conversation with Ānanda regarding what should be done with his corporeal remains. The Buddha says that, "As Ānanda, they treat the body of a *Cakravartin* (wheel turning monarch), so they should treat the body of the *Tathāgata*". The Buddha then details the specific funerary rights appropriate to monarchs and the Buddha, culminating in the construction of a *stupa* over his physical relics, clearly revealing that a *stupa* is a known funerary monument. This *stupa* must be built at the intersection of four great roads. He further adds that, "Those who offer there a garland, or scent, or paint, or make a salutation, or feel serene joy in their heart, that will be to their benefit and well-being for a long time."[82] The *stupa* then becomes, at least in the mind of the laity, after the Buddha's physical passing from this world, an object of personalised devotion, public veneration and visual symbol *par excellence* of the Buddha, his *Dharma*, the *Sangha*. The *stupa* (especially when it contains the relics of the Buddha himself) *is* the Buddha.[83] Further, the Buddha himself, it is claimed by the *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra*, mentions four important places of pilgrimage that every noble Buddhist should visit, and that those who die with joyful hearts *en route* to these sites will be reborn in a heavenly realm. The same section of the text also says that, "There are wise nobles, wise brahmanas and wise householders who are devoted to the Tathāgata; they will perform the *śarīra puja* of the Tathāgata".[84]

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[80] For instance, there is some evidence of early Jain *stupas*, like the famous remains from *Kankali Tila*, Mathura, excavated first by Führer in 1890-91, and later by the ASI under Cunningham, see Vincent A Smith 1901, (reprinted) 1994.

[81] *Digha Nikaya* 2.141

[82] *ibid.*

[83] see Paul Mus, 1935.

[84] ["*Sant' Ananda khattiya-pandita pi brahmana-pandita pi gahapati-pandita pi Tathagate abhippasanna, te Tathagatassa sarira-pujam karissantiti*"; *Digha Nikaya,* 2.141, as quoted by Trainor, *op. Cit.*, p. 53.] This 'physical-body' or *śarira* worship included a week long wake, during which various acts of homage with music, dance, garlands, perfume, hymns and the like were offered. There seems to be some debate as Trainor says [*op. Cit.* p.55], on the translation and implication of '*śarira*'- as to whether it means the physical body, or relics and remains of the Buddha. It is commonly known that even in its simple translation into South Asian vernaculars, '*śarira*' means physical body, an outer casing, and this is exactly how the texts seem to treat it in this context here. This has been shown by Schopen in "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*: An Old Misunderstanding in regard to Monastic Buddhism", 1991, reprinted in *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks*, Hawaii, 1997.

What concerns us here is not the importance that this obviously has for Buddhological studies on the cult of *stupa* and relic worship, but that such passages underscore ideas of personalised devotion directed to material 'manifestations' (whether relic, image or a living person symbolised through an inanimate "*śarīra*") of higher spiritual ideals. It is only on such ideological bases of faith and devotion that the popularity of visual receptors of religious, cultic worship are constructed. Once this attitude exists, it is of course open to endless elaboration such as complexities of architectural and iconographical symbolism, as it has been through history. My views here should certainly not be misread as implying that these attitudes were specifically post-Buddhist phenomena in India. To the contrary, it seems from various accounts that such ideas already existed and were used to Buddhist ends with great felicity. To our benefit, they have been meticulously documented in Buddhist texts and it is for that reason that we bring them up here, in a study of how images on the whole, may have been viewed in post-Aśokan North, Central and Eastern India.

Such a move towards *Bhakti* and theism is documented in the broadly contemporary *Bhagvat Gitā*. Here, an absolute, unmanifest declares himself to become a more immanent, visible icon – a living image which is differentiated, corporeal, manifest and accessible.[85] "I am indeed unborn, myself imperishable...even so I do enter into the material world, which is mine, and take birth through my own powers of appearance at any time" - 4.6-8. Bhandarkar was the first to note the importance of the rise of theism in engendering anthropomorphic imagery in 1913.[86] His carefully constructed argument collated sources on various religious traditions that may have been active in Early-Historic India. These traditions were at times in conflict, and at others complimentary. Literary sources were tied in with concrete archaeological evidence available from inscriptions, the remains of the apsidal temple at Vidisha, Garuda pillar at Besnagar, Gudimallam linga and other sculptural and architectural works that showed how

[85] This is the very characteristic of all subsequent Indic imagery, especially with the cults of Visnu, Siva and Devi whether they be incarnations of Visnu, manifestations of Siva... they are simultaneously both, immanent and transcendental. Where images fabricated by humans and inhabited by Gods become the primary sites of ongoing interaction and exchange between humans and God. This attitude toward images becomes a vital characteristic of late ancient, mediaeval Indian culture.
For an elaboration of this nature, and the explanations for anthropomorphism in later textual sources see R. Davis: 1997: pp.28-29.

[86] Bhandarkar, RG: 1913.

several theistic deities emerged in a period when the textual sources were themselves betraying signs of the shift from pre-existing modes of worship. The emergent cults harked back to devotional practices of more popular religious ideas that were married with some of the deities and ideals of the more exclusive philosophical doctrines, be they Buddhist, Vedic, Upaniṣadic or any other. Embedded in the Gita, lies an acknowledgement of ideas that hail from Buddhit, Jain, Upaniṣadic, Samkhya, Yoga and other philosophical sources combined with a masterly theophany in Chapter 11, that establishes the *Viṣvarūpa* of *Krishna* at the fearful, unborn, personalised object of his followers' faith.

Similarly, in the Jaina *Āvaṣyaka Sutra (Churni)* (Ratlam edition) by *Jinadāsa*[87] there is a clear account of the six years of asceticism that Makkhali Gosala, the founder of the Ājīvika faith spent with Mahāvīra. During this period they are said to have often stayed at temples of either Vāsudeva or Baladeva. In one of the references, even an icon is specifically mentioned as the deity of the temple. Basham says that, "It is significant that Gosala's adventures are said to have taken place in Vaiṣnavite temples. Jinadasa may indeed have been guilty of anachronism in these episodes, for it is by no means certain that temple worship and iconolatory had developed in India in the sixth century BC. But the gods involved, Vasudeva and Baladeva are among the earliest Vaiṣnavite divinities known to us." Basham doubts the presence of temples, but agrees that these references "suggest the devotees of some *bhakti* cult, and we have evidence that, like these, the Ājīvikas employed music in their religious practice."[88]

However references to the early development of *Vāsudeva-Krishna*, the *Vṛṣnis* and *Bhagvata* cults along with early representations of the worship of Shiva as a linga are also contemporary with the terracotta studied here.[89] Since these ideas are reserved to stone imagery they have

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[87] As quoted by Basham: 1951: p. 42 ~ 46.

[88] Basham, 1951: p. 47.

[89] These deities were often worshipped at apsidal shrines. The Gudimallam linga was built in an apsidal shrine see Sivaramamurti, 1977: p. 442; see: Khare, MD, 1967: pp 21-27; Irwin, John: 1974, pp.1-13; Vogel, J. Ph. 1912, pp. 126-29.

not been elaborated upon here. At the same time, their rise draws ones attention to the heady mix of ideas that were gaining ground in this period.

III

Religious historians tend to examine a single aspect of the faith that they study. Ideas can therefore be neatly presented in separate categories. But social behaviour, cultic affiliation, religious practice are seldom neatly subscribed to a people at any time or place. I have tried to draw the reader's attention to a wide range of religious and social practices that formed a significant part of the cultural fabric of the Early-Historic period. Although several aspects have been excluded from this brief survey, it is clear that the religion of the period was far from a simple conglomeration of Theravada and post-Vedic spiritual discourse.

Once we accept that not only do these icons show the iconography of some popular deities which can not be recognised as Buddhist, Jain, or obviously Brahmanic, but that they belong to some codified system all the same, we have to then admit that this must have been the expression of widespread cult(s) that we have no record of. These are images which do not fit into the narrow confines of contemporary textual religion, but in the more open field of religious practice with mythology, folklore, festival and poetry lending a more immediate background for their appreciation. Further, because they both archaeologically, and stylistically belong to a period that began before the reliefs of Bharhut, these plaques bear some of the first truly clear iconic figures that were fashioned in the history of Indian art. It is in this respect that I disagree with the view that has been held thus far that the *Yakṣas* which are seen on *stupa* railings were, as Sutherland says, "the first iconic figures to be fashioned in the development of Indian art and were created as subordinate figures in the retinue of the Buddha, surrounding some iconic symbol of the Master himself." [90] Undoubtedly, most visual imagery that we see at this time is the product of an age where, every faith was both theologically and practically groping for iconic representation, and in that, neither are the

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terracotta, nor are the stone *Yakṣas* in Buddhist contexts- alone. It is a very exciting age for the archaeologist and art historian with its earliest visible practices of Vaiṣnavism, Shaivism, Buddhism, Jainism, and a still more prolific, widespread and entrenched Other: expressed in the long standing tradition of terracotta. No one text or argument mentioned in this chapter would have provided the specific impulse to make these deities, nor are we in a position to answer exactly who they are. Instead, our aim has been to create a more immediate background that would have informed the creation of these icons.

I have tried to provide a peep into a more social anthropological approach to religion with an emphasis on customs, rites and beliefs set within a historical frame of contemporary social relations. Naturally then, this chapter could not present any one set of neatly argued ideas, as there was no such historical situation. Just as a divide existed between the various strains of Hindu-Brahmanical philosophies and practice, the same was seen in Buddhism. Small moulded plaques of clay, easily dedicated and commonly available, have to be seen in the light of the broader cultural beliefs and practices of religiously charged behaviour. Further, the terracotta images have been situated within the context of the arts of the period as a whole in order to be able to differentiate their specific iconography from the others. This allows us two lines of interpretation. The common elements shared between all the arts of the period reflect their broad religious and cultural milieu. The ones expressed only in terracotta reflect the pantheon, behaviour and ideas that engendered this imagery. The sources cited here are a very small part of an expansive body that could be brought to show how different cults were undergoing a transformation in this period. These changes encompassed a historical shift characterised by the rise of urban towns and the incorporation of popular religious practices. Cults had their own complex divinities and rites, many of which were documented in a depotentiated state by the literary sources. Some other cultic practices were fused with those of the *śramanas* and those clubbed for the sake of convenience under the umbrella Brahmanism. The significant role of the worship of the dead, the stupa's harking back funerary and ancestor worship, the doctrine of the transfer of merit to deceased and living relatives, the *Yakṣas* intimate relation

[90] GH Sutherland: 1991: p. 17.

with *Bhutas*, *Pretas* and others of the spirit world, emphasise Early-Historic India's fascination with death. Related to this were the gods of diseases who stole children and caused death. These magical, harmful and beautiful gods had to be venerated through personalised devotion, their myths enacted in sacred festivals and performances. This picture is a far more relevant explanation for the imagery.

The terracotta plaques have been variously interpreted in chapter 3. Not all of them can be identified. They inhabit a world of dances [figs. 3.206, 3.250] and masked characters [figs. 3.246-249], musicians and festive gatherings [figs. 3.244, 3.235]. Deities are worshipped in shrines [figs. 3.2, 3.73, 3.89, 3.168, 3.188]. They are worshipped with flowers [3.189] and bestow coins and blessings [3.194]. They possess supernatural features like wings [3.179,3.97, 3.151], ride on lotuses [fig. 3.80], animals [3.229] and goblins [fig. 3.271, 3.283, 3.145]. Flanked by flags and standards, they are beautiful [3.210], seen to adorn themselves [3.211, 3.29] and yet their weapons constantly show their power [3.47]. While some of them grant, others abduct [3.106]. They are intimately connected with water [3.288-90], foliage and birds [3.193, 3.204] and when horrific, with lizards, snakes and owls [3.116-7]. Many of these iconographic formulae are not to be found in any of the other arts of the period. Thus while these objects form, at one level, a part of the general religious outlook of the age, they also express a separate system within it. This prolific imagery, more "democratic" (if we dare use that word) by their choice and manipulation of clay are informed by a slightly different set of specifics within this climate. Just as stone imagery on contemporary stupas while remaining a part of this general cultural ambience was used to show Buddhist practices, terracotta also reflects a differentiated tradition within the whole. Their relationship with relics, talismanic appearance and iconography point one more specifically to the nature of practices outlined above. Undoubtedly, with more research into these texts with a view to identifying the terracotta images, we may even discover their names and myths more precisely.

For the moment, what emerges is the seminal role of these objects in creating some of the earliest and most widespread iconographic programmes of India and still more important, in

utilising a lexicon of symbols and artistic formulae that allow us to 'read' images to date. This included an early importance to a world of gesture, *āsana* and *mudrā*, the association of *āyudhas* and weapons as attributes of divinities and in using lotuses, *cauris*, *chhatras* and subordinate figures to enhance the status of the divine. The plaques are marked by qualities of narrative skill, humour, *ṣrngara* and joyousness, eroticism and horror. We have here a complete system of ideas and expression that does not just mirror what become *de rigueur* in later periods, but survives as one of its most influential antecedents.

Chapter 5
CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to examine the importance of a large body of images of terracotta made between *circa* second century BC and first century AD for the history of Indian art. The studies that have been conducted on these objects so far, have largely been restricted to a site or small geographical unit. The majority of these images have never been published. By collecting and examining thousands of them for this study, not only was it our intention to expose this important genre of imagery, but also to situate them within a broader canvas of artistic production in early India.

To this end, images had first to be collected and organised. This formed one of the principal aims of this study. Data from approximately 50 sites was collated. Much of the material was found in private and public collections scattered across the globe. Representative examples from the better-documented sites have been illustrated in this work. This data could then be used for stylistic and empirical study, which was conducted in chapters two and three. The latter chapter detailed the regional iconographic and stylistic predilections within the corpus of Early-Historic moulded terracotta.

The same chapter also provided an introduction to the different sites that have revealed terracotta images and their archaeology. This included a comprehensive study of not just the better known sites of Chandraketugarh, Kaushambi, Mathura Kaushambi and Taxila, but also extended the study to include Sugh, Akra, Ropar, Tilaura-Kot, and others in the Lower Gangetic Valley which usually remain out of the purview of standard histories.

The plaques have been interpreted to show that rapid changes occurred in the nature of Indian art towards the end of the third century BC. Since most works by scholars have concentrated on the 'major', stone sculptures of the period, hardly any continuum from pre-existing imagery in India could be established. Since some of the earliest stone sculptures from India come from the Mauryan period, stone was a relatively new medium for sculpture in

the second century BC. And yet, when it was used to carve the railings and gateways of Buddhist stupas like Bharhut and Sanchi or the grand caves of Bhaja, Bedsa and Karle, the artistic style and iconographic concerns of the sculptors were already so advanced, that it is evident their sculptors must have been familiar with some long standing artistic expression in wood or clay that has not survived the vicissitudes of time.

While most of the terracotta plaques are contemporary with the Buddhist monuments, a significant enough number predate them. Strong similarities with these objects were found in the other 'minor' antiquities of the Subcontinent that could be dated to as far back as the Indus Valley period. At the same time, the objects began to slowly eke out their own independent style. Both types of objects, some which have been called 'timeless' and others that were specific to this period alone, coexisted. These two categories however were never mutually exclusive. A dialogue between the forms of these objects is noticeable. The form of the undifferentiated goddesses seen on Mauryan ring-stones and early stone plaques is not different from some of their contemporary terracotta and gold reliefs. These are in turn closely related to the more decorative and narrative representations of goddesses in post-Mauryan antiquities. Other examples that show a unity in underlying concerns but differences in stylistic expression between pre-existing forms and post-Mauryan terracotta were also noticed. Keeping these threads of continuity in mind is crucial for understanding where the great expressions of Indian art in subsequent imagery derive from. All too often when indigenous ancestry for objects is not immediately available, Indological studies have looked to Western Asiatic and late Hellenistic forms. These foreign influences were exceedingly persuasive and do find reference in both stone and terracotta objects from this period. However, without an appreciation of what was being persuaded, our understanding will always remain incomplete. Terracotta objects are survivals of one of the 'perishable' media that are available from early India and need to be examined in greater detail to contextualise the cultural exchanges that were taking place.

At the same time, it was found that while these objects continued to remain informed by their antecedents, they also initiated some dramatic changes in their depiction. The predilection

towards flat relief sculpture marks all the arts of the period. In terracotta this was achieved through the moulding of plaques. One of the more important developments of the age lay in the multiplication of types of figures and symbols. Their consistent use in many thousand works of art reveal one of the earliest systems of South Asian visual iconography.

In his studies on iconography and iconology, Panofsky[1] distinguished three levels of interpretation that could be available to a group of related images. These can be brought to bear on our understanding of post-Mauryan terracotta plaques. This involved pre-iconographic description (a pseudo formal analysis) in the first stage, followed by iconographic analysis in the narrow sense, and finally iconographic interpretation (from 1955 called iconological interpretation) in the deeper sense.

Pre-iconographic description employed a thorough identification of artistic motifs. A distinguishing between factual subjects (people, animals, objects, attributes) and their underlying relationships or expressive subjects (gestures, poses, expression of atmosphere / context, the situation or event). This world of motifs are then, according to Panofsky, already in the process of communicating meaning. A meaning that we are able to receive by virtue of being open to noticing patterns or commonalties in groups of objects in order to allow interpretation to begin. This comprises the stage of iconographic analysis. The last stage, is to move toward the intrinsic meaning, the fundamental nature of the culture that engendered these objects. We have followed a similar structure in this work, where motifs and images have first been empirically collated, their relative relationships established and subsequently been situated within the cultural atmosphere that engendered them.

Chapter two also explored the nature of the dramatic transformation of the previous systems of image making in approximately the second century BC. New techniques of representation were noted and it was seen that artists were coming to grapple with a variety of media.

[1] Panofsky presented his theory in a preliminary version in 1939, (*Studies in Iconology)* and with minor amendments in 1955 (*Meaning in the visual arts*).

Unexploited possibilities in old image formulae were now fulfilled, and entirely new and innovative image-formulae were devised.

In the next stage, 'types' needed to be made, and they were placed in their historical context. We sought to introduce objects formally to achieve two ends. The first being to present a corpus of raw material to be contextualised that has received negligible attention by scholarship thus far. Second, to establish that the visual traditions seen in this period and material soon grew into a set of image-formulae that are referred to in Indian art for millennia ahead. Undoubtedly, not all the image-formulae persisted, but those with greater 'iconographic gravity' continued to endure. However, it would be illogical to assume that what a motif meant in 200 BC remains the same till today. Although many visual formulae remain consistent, the same motif can be reinterpreted to possess different meanings in relation to the specific contexts of its age.[2]

And in the last stage in chapter four, the history of the culture in general needed examination to see how these images express their contemporary historical conditions, social and religious concepts. Traditionally this last stage has attracted criticism. It is often not valid to place a work of art made for an exclusive audience in a general historical environment. Our medium however, has the singular distinction of being available for a more 'subaltern' interpretation of visual history of India from the second century BC to the first century AD. Care has been taken in the choice of sources selected for the interpretation of these figures, and the general cultural context in which they were created, to attempt to the degree possible, an examination of the data through more pertinent sources.

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[2] Take for example, Saxl's study of winged figures in western art. (F. Saxl: 1957: pp. 1- 12.) He shows how the motif of wings existed first on a Sumerian deity, the formula was then taken over in classical Greece for Nike, which, with some modifications, transformed into the Roman image of Victory. In time, that served as a prototype of sorts for Christian angels by the sixth century AD: illustrating the 'iconographic gravity' of the concept of the winged figure, as well as showing the accretion of meaning that such motifs experienced. Similar studies have also been conducted in Indian art, take for instance the work first conducted by Coomaraswamy on Yakshas (1928 b), and subsequently by Misra (1981) and Sutherland (1991), which have all illustrated how the form of the early Yaksha possessed an iconographic gravity such that its visual conception endured and yet was transformed in its meaning in different periods. A smilar study on the changing nature of the lotus in Indian art can be found in Bosch (1960).

To seek a single rigorously coherent theme in the iconographic programme would be misguided, instead we saw that several collectively shared cognitive orders emerged in Early-Historic India. These could be pan-Indic, united in the ideology that they expressed, as in the cult of the lady with (usually) five weapons in her hair, *Gaja-lakshmi* and pot-bellied demonic figures. Most of these figures harked back to some pre-existing cults, our information for which had to be refracted through later works. Some expressions, however, were localised, seen in the case of those images that are more popular in one region than in others. Take for instance the greater number of *maithunas* in Bengal versus *mithunas* in other regions.

The moment there is a unity in the orders of figures and their depiction across such a broad geographical sweep, we can read it as an iconography, and when several related iconographies coexist and refer to one another, it reflects an elaborate iconographic programme. This opens the objects to all manner of investigation, artistic, sociological, historical and for the history of religion. We could also therefore study what was special about this period to have initiated these developments. One of the biggest artistic changes was of an older tradition of simple goddesses and other figures being apotheosised, canonised.

This was done through a language, both overtly symbolic and artistically aware. Chapter three showed how the figures themselves are artistically united at one level with all other sculptural arts of this period, at another they express a localised idiom that varies according to the choice of medium and its specific regional affiliation. The pieces come from a wide variety of sites and many of them have been scientifically excavated. The associated archaeological objects found with these figures and a consideration of their style allow us to date the vast majority of the moulded plaques discussed in this work to an approximately 250 year period of production between the second century BC and the first century AD. Various issues with regard to the dating of the objects and the archaeology of the sites where they were discovered have also been considered.

Finally, in chapter 4, the objects have themselves been placed within the broader social, religious and historical context that could have engendered them. This was to provide a context for an iconological study that the terracotta arts themselves offer. The nature of religious and social historical forces at play in the period were complex and varied. Some of these are well known to traditional art historical discourse, but others had to be culled or emphasised. Take for instance, the importance and variety of worship surrounding relics (in Buddhism and Jainism) or other forms of cults surrounding death and disease, and the strength of the role of Yakshas and their ilk who demanded personalised devotion (*puja*) in engendering anthropomorphic imagery. The importance of several worshipful activities expressed through both rituals and festivals, through a complex melange of mythology, folklore and doctrine in performances- masked, ritualistic or 'secular' were set against a background of broader religio-philosophical changes that saw the rise of theism and anthropomorphism. This was a period with the flourishing of a process of urbanisation that had begun well before the Mauryan. A period that had also begun to actually internalise the eclecticism engendered by the assimilation of the waves of new peoples that had been entering the Subcontinent, through an extended involvement with Central and Western Asia, and by proxy with lands further west. Such a broader cultural view of the age is essential in appreciating the form these early images took.

We also found that boundaries between different systems of categorising this material that have been suggested so far are inadequate. Moulded plaques cannot continue to be bracketed under the misnomer "Sunga". Both the word Sunga, and the time period that is often extended to these figures is defective. The figures in fact continued to be made from at least the second century BC to the first century AD. A period that saw rapid political changes, the end of Mauryan rule, the Sungas, Kanvas, various local Mitras, Dattas, Scythians, Parthians and other rulers. Besides, the plaques were made over a long duration of at least 250 years, the majority of which were well past the dynastic dates of the Sungas.

Chapters two and three were also able to nuance the chronology of the style of these figures. For instance, figures previously dated and blocked under the category 'Mauryan' actually

started to be made before the Mauryas came to power and continued well after. Similarly, some styles and iconographic types popular in the moulded terracotta began in dates that correspond with the decline of the Mauryas and last at least until the arrival of the Kushans at Mathura. In Bengal, the images had a longer shelf life and were seen until about the third century AD.

Within the broad style of the period, several localised idioms are seen. These can be particular to a region, and at times to a site. Further, the techniques utilised by their craftsmen were not limited to flat plaques pulled from single moulds but included double-moulding, hollow casting, stamped and appliqué decorated figurines and modelled forms. Sometimes a combination of methods was employed.

It was also noted that while the stone sculpture of the period is mostly Buddhist, the iconography of the terracottas does not match it, and therefore expresses some other tradition. It is also possible to relate the terracotta plaques to contemporary metal and ivory sculpture. Consequently, while we can acknowledge the broad parity in the style of all the sculpture of the period irrespective of media, the difference in the iconographic content between the 'major' and 'minor' arts is noteworthy. The plaques are seen to express an iconography rooted in an ancient culture of myth and magic, superstition, folklore, ritual performances of festivals and a strong belief in deities of death and disease. These are related, in part, to what have come down to us various *grahas*, *bhūtas*, *ganas*, *pishāchas*, *nāgas*, *apsaras* and *yakshas*. In a brief examination of Indian texts, the sections concerning such deities were found to inhabit a general cultural worldview that is mirrored in the plaques themselves. That such beliefs were current in the age we are examining, is borne out by recent research into the nature of early Buddhist practices, texts on the performing arts, disease and medicine and further, from the inscriptions of Aśoka and those on Buddhist monuments. These traditions antedate their expression on Buddhist monuments, and must be looked at more closely to appreciate what informs subsequent Indic faiths.

Their presence in a medium such as terracotta, or for that matter in other small, private objects is also explicable. Stone had, until the Śunga period, only been seen with the Mauryas, and when compared to terracotta, is a relatively new medium in the history of India's sculptural tradition. Stone also found most of its supporters in the Buddhist community whether we look at Mauryan, Śunga or Satvahana art history. From their form, choice of medium and size, it is clear that these 'minor' arts fulfilled more the private desires of their worshippers functioning to appease gods who demanded personalised devotion, as opposed to the organised collective agencies of wealthy Sanghas or Vedic priests who performed elaborate public rituals.

There is room for much more work to be done on these objects. In particular, textual sources have to be carefully selected and interpreted to extrapolate more precisely who these figures are. We also desperately need more detailed information on the specific archaeological context in which they are found. There is extreme urgency in this matter as exceptionally large quantities of them, particularly from eastern India, are appearing on the International market with no information on their archaeology. Without this information, our understanding of these fascinating objects will remain handicapped.

These objects hold the potential for significantly adding to our understanding of early Indian religious practices. For the moment, it is hoped that this study has at least revealed that there were well codified and organised system(s) of cultic practice current in Ancient India that have not been given the attention they warrant. There is already a strong move towards reassessing early Buddhist practices, and hopefully these contemporaneous plaques might at least footnote this shift in scholarship adding to our knowledge of the history and sociology of religion and social relations.

Appendix 1

LIST OF PRINCIPAL SITES AND COLLECTIONS STUDIED

Public Collections:

1. ASI collection at Ropar.
2. Collection of Panjab University, Chandigarh.
3. Dept. of Ancient History Culture and Archaeology, Kurukshetra University .
4. Govt. Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.
5. Haryana State Archaeology and its collections at / from Sugh, Naurangabad, Agroha.
6. Punjab State Archaeology, and their collections at / from Sanghol, Ropar and Sunet.

7. ASI collection at Purana Qila (collections from Tamluk, Hastinapur, etc.)
8. National Museum, New Delhi.
9. Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.
10. State Museum. Jaipur.

11. ASI collection at Sanchi.
12. Birla Museum, Bhopal.
13. State Museum, Vidisha.

14. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj.
15. ASI collection at Sarnath.
16. Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.
17. BHU Dept. of Ancient History Culture and Archaeology.
18. Mathura Govt. Museum.
19. Municipal Museum Allahabad.
20. University Museum, Allahabad.

21. ASI collection at Bodh Gaya.
22. ASI collection at Vaishali.
23. Department of Archaeology, Kathmandu, Nepal.
24. National Museum, Kathmandu.
25. Patna Museum.
26. Sitaram Upadhyaya Sanghralaya, Buxar.

27. Asutosh Mukherjee Museum, Calcutta.
28. Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Calcutta.
29. Indian Museum, Calcutta.
30. Site Museum, Tamluk.
31. West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Behala, Calcutta.

32. Art Institute, Chicago.
33. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
34. British Museum, London.
35. Brooklyn Museum.

36. Cleveland Museum of Art.
37. LA County Museum.
38. Metropolitan Museum, New York.
39. Musée Guimet.
40. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.
41. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
42. Philadelphia Museum.
43. V&A, London.

Private Collections:

1. Arnold Lieberman, New York.
2. Christie's, London and New York.
3. Doris Wiener, New York.
4. Harsh / Suresh Neotia, Calcutta.
5. John Eskenazi, London.
6. John Siudmak, London.
7. Peter Marks, New York.
8. Sebastiano Barbagallo, London.
9. Sotheby's, London and New York.
10. Spink and Son, London.
11. Steven Kossak, New York.
12. Subhash Kapoor, New York.
13. Swami Omanand Saraswati, Jhajjar.
14. VK Kanoria, Patna.

Important Terracotta Sites Considered in this Dissertation:

1. The Northwest
    1. Akra / Bannu
    2. Charsada
    3. Semthan
    4. Taxila

2. Indo Gangetic Divide
    5. Agroha
    6. Gurgaon
    7. Kurukshetra
    8. Naurangabad
    9. Ropar
    10. Sanghol
    11. Sugh
    12. Sunet

3. Upper Gangetic Valley
    13. Ahichhatra
    14. Ayodhya
    15. Bhita
    16. Hastinapura
    17. Jhusi
    18. Kannauj
    19. Kaushambi

20. Mathura
21. Sankissa
22. Sonkh

4. Middle Gangetic Valley
    23. Basarh
    24. Bulandibagh / Kumrahar / Patna
    25. Rajghat
    26. Sonpur
    27. Tilaura-Kot
    28. Vaishali

5. Lower Gangetic Valley
    29. Bangarh
    30. Chandraketugarh
    31. Harinarayanpur
    32. Mahasthangarh
    33. Mangalkot
    34. Tamluk

Appendix 2

FAKES AND FORGERIES

There has been some concern in recent years as to whether the objects being sold in the art market are genuine. An exceptionally large number of post-Mauryan plaques of high quality have come to light over the past two decades. At first glance it seems curious that pieces of this standard should come to light only now even though archaeology in the Indian Subcontinent has been conducting large scale excavations for over a century. The objects are also commanding very high prices. Naturally, any study that examines them must treat the data with circumspection. However, just because we have not seen such a large quantity of pieces of this type before does not necessarily mean they are fake. The problem of 'fakes' in early Indian art is a complex one and I present here some issues that have to be borne in mind.

1. What is a fake post-Mauryan terracotta? A simple answer to that would be a terracotta sculpture deliberately made to look as if it was made in the post-Mauryan period. However, in a period when sculptures were merely pressed out of moulds making a perfect pastiche is child's play IF one has access to original moulds.

2. Even if a forgerer used original moulds the authenticity of the pieces can be determined through thermoluminescence tests. Recently, I have even heard rumours about these tests being circumvented but before giving in to bazaar gossip we should examine the technique of thermoluminescence testing itself. These tests are performed on objects made of fired clay by archaeologists in order to date ceramic assemblages. "Thermoluminescence is the property of some materials which have accumulated energy over a long period of becoming luminescent when pre-treated and subjected to high temperatures." In other words, a small sample is taken from an object that has been fired and by measuring the light emitted from the sample under conditions of heat we can determine when the object was last fired. However, even in

the more successful tests the date achieved is only an approximate, usually about 300 years more or less than the date revealed by the tests. Even so, it is still able to eliminate objects that might have been made by a modern forgerer.

The test could, arguably, be side-stepped if the part of the plaque sent for sampling happens to be an ancient portion in the middle of modern workmanship. Although such techniques of forging are seen in other Indian sculptures, using it in post-Mauryan terracotta is not easy, as the plaques can be sampled from several places. A second method rumoured to elude testing is by fashioning a plaque made from finely ground bricks and sherds that were originally fired in the Early-Historic period. However, in order to make these particles stick together they would have to either be fired again or suspended in a liquid adhesive. In the former case, the tests would note the more recent firing. The latter case is also easily detectable. No matter how coarsely or finely particles of pre-fired clay may be ground, by suspending them in an adhesive the resultant plaque will lose its porosity – one of the most fundamental characteristics of all fired clay objects. Porosity can be checked by noting at least a 15% difference in the weight of a red clay terracotta object before and after it has been submerged in water for an extended period. Since few collectors will be willing to risk the latter method, commonly objects are licked to feel the absorptive texture of the clay. Objects, if fashioned out of coarse clay pre-fired clay will lack the fine detail and the textures that characterise these plaques.

3. Our answer to the question 'what is a fake?' is in fact more complex. We live by the basic rule that the older the object is, the more authentic, more real, and more valuable it will be. However, What is fake for a collector need not be fake for the art-historian. If an object has been pressed out from an ancient mould, made from the same Bengali or Mathura clay and fired in the same pit-kilns, it is in no way different from how a product made from the same mould would have been in 200 BC. While they may not satisfy the needs of a collector, they remain art-historically significant, being no different from their 'originals'.

4. Art historians keen to dismiss most of the recently discovered pieces as 'fake', may argue that they are not made from original moulds, that they are entirely new conceptions. However, the mere absence of such pieces in previous excavations can not be taken to assume that they are not real. Vast tracts of India remain unexcavated, and excavations themselves have been centred around 'major' antiquities and ancient urban centres. The selection of sites for excavation have been guided by textual references to them in Buddhist and other sources (see Chapter 1). Considering all of the above factors, it is no surprise that many aspects of Ancient India still lie buried. And if the objects are not genuine, that would mean that someone has been responsible for conjuring a most spectacular and interrelated iconographic network, a cohesive style, and entire cultural language. A con man who is more than just academic, he must in fact be one of the greatest Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist seers of all time! The sheer quantity and cohesive language of these plaques must allow us to banish that notion. As long as we continue to dismiss this material as 'fake', scholarship will remain stunted about one of the most fascinating periods in Indian history.

That is not to say that there are *no* forgeries being made. However, for the moment at least, their percentage is still insignificant within the thousands of genuine articles. All the same, in this study I have taken care to use as much excavated material as possible. Of the surface collections considered here, again, I have used mostly those housed in local site museums, or those under the care of State Archaeological Surveys in UP, Bengal, Haryana and Punjab. Some of the pieces in private hands have been tested through thermoluminescence. And where no tests were available, I have compared the pieces with others found in scientifically conducted excavations or in the collections of site museums across India. I

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3.97 Fragmentary torso of winged male, Kaushambi, 2nd to 1st centuries BC, 5¼ x 3¾", Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. K 2545). Photo © AIIS (No. 12.18)

3.98 Fragment of winged figure. Kaushambi, 2nd to 1st centuries BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 3273).

3.99 Winged male figure, Upper Gangetic Valley, 1st century BC, h. 10.5cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 42-43.3037), Photo © AIIS (No. 365.42)

3.100 Winged male figure, Kaushambi, 2nd to 1st centuries BC, 11 x 5.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. K204). Photo © AIIS (No. 9.71)

3.101 Winged male figure with a bow and arrow (*Vidyadhara*? *Kama*?), Upper Gangetic Valley, 1st century BC, h. 9cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 39.2849), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.90)

3.102 Male deity with bow and arrows trampling a small figure, Upper Gangetic Valley, h. 12.5cm, 1st century BC, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 34.2557), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.93)

3.103 Male deity with bow and arrow, Mathura, 1st century BC, 10.3 x 7cm,Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. M2434) Photo © AIIS (No. 8.30)

3.104 Male torso holding a peacock (more complete versions show wigs at the figure's shoulders). Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 8.5 x 10.8 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K4825), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.22).

3.105 Giant *Yaksha* figure carrying a woman, possibly a 'Ramayana' scene. Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Allahabad University Museum, Photo © AIIS (No. 618.61).

3.106 Giant *Yaksha* figure carrying a woman, possibly a 'Ramayana' scene. Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 18.5 x 8 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K5108), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.32).

3.107 Devotee with basket of offerings, found in the riverbed of the Yamuna, Agra Dist., 1st century BC, h. 5.4 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 28.1731) Photo © AIIS (No. 365.34).

3.108 Standing nude male figure with exaggerated shoulders, (?Tirthankara), Deegh Darwaza, Mathura, 2nd century BC, h. 12.3 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 54.3791) Photo © AIIS (No. 365.47).

3.109 Male figure with a tethered goat, Upper Gangetic Valley, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (1699).

3.110 Male figure with a tethered goat, Upper Gangetic Valley, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (23091).

3.111 Man holding lead tied to a deer, Ahichhatra, 1st century BC, 10 x 8.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. 2510), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.39).

3.112 Partly moulded image in the round probably depicting a Hellenistic figure, Upper Gangetic Valley, 2nd century BC, h. 11.8 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 71.12), Photo © AIIS (No. 356.38).

3.113 (a and b) Front and reverse of standing male figure in a coat and shawl, Mathura Dist., late 2nd – 1st century BC, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 35.2556), Photo © AIIS (Nos. 356.36 and 356.37).

3.114 (a, b and c)3 views of modelled male head in turban, Kaushambi area, 1st century AD, h. 12.2 cm, Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Bombay (No. 81.4/3)

3.115 Moulded terracotta grimacing pot-bellied dwarf (*Yaksha*?)carrying an *ankusha*, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 8 x 5.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K5390), Photo © AIIS (No. 190.29)

3.116 Moulded terracotta grimacing pot-bellied dwarf (*Yaksha*?), Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 14 x 7 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K439), Photo © AIIS (No. 11.37)

3.117 Double-moulded terracotta rattle of a grimacing pot-bellied dwarf (*Yaksha*?) holding an owl, Kaushambi area, 1st century BC, h. 4", Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (No. 27.346), Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

3.118 *Mithuna* plaque with faint traces of ayudhas in the female partner's hair, Ahichhatra (excavation record No. AC-V-6127), 2nd – 1st century BC, 9.5 x 6.5 cm, Collection of the ASI, Purana Qila, Delhi (No. 62.25/100).

3.119 Dark grey *Mithuna* plaque, standing on its own pedestal, Mathura region, 2nd – 1st century BC, Kanoria collection, Patna.

3.120 *Mithuna* couple with tall headdresses and lotus buds between them, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 10 x 7 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K538), Photo © AIIS (No. 66.46).

3.121 *Mithuna* plaque, Northern UP, 1st century BC, h. 12.5 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 61.5227), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.61).

3.122 *Mithuna* plaque, Northern UP, 1st – 2nd centuries AD, h. 8 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 32.2557), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.59).

3.123 Embracing *Mithuna* plaque, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 5.5 x 3 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K3303), Photo © AIIS (No. 66.87).

3.124 *Mithuna* plaque, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 9 x 5.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K3513), Photo © AIIS (No. 66.60).

3.125 *Mithuna* plaque, Sonkh, Level 25, 'Late Mitra', Late 1st century BC, h. 14.6 cm, Photo after Härtel: 1993: fig. 73, p.111.

3.126 Embracing *Mithuna* couple, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 13 x 6 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K5196), Photo © AIIS (No. 202.66).

3.127 *Mithuna* plaque with the artisan's palm printed in the clay on reverse, Upper Gangetic Valley, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 2/22126).

3.128 *Mithuna* couple seated on a chair, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 9.5 x 8 cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.129 *Mithuna* plaque, Northern UP, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, h. 14 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 42.2921), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.64).

3.130 Dancing *Mithuna* couple, Mathura, 1st century BC, Allahabad Municipal Museum (M2472), Photo © AIIS (No. 202.63).

3.131 Seated couple, with male playing bow-harp watch dancers, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 10.5 x 8.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K4319), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.13).

3.132 Amorous couple with attendants, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K5286), Photo © AIIS (No. 202.73).

3.133 *Mithuna* pair seated on a chair before a building, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, h. 10 cm, Allahabad University Museum, Photo © AIIS (No. 618.63).

3.134 Fragmentary *Maithuna* scene, Jhusi, 1st century BC, 5 x 3.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (Jh 5281), Photo © AIIS (No. 10.9).

3.135 Male under *chhatra* riding a chariot pulled by four bulls, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 11 x 9 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K 5075), Photo © AIIS (No. 202.61).

3.136 Elaborate chariot with toranas with helmeted rider(s) pulled by goats, Mathura, Late 1st century BC – 1st century AD, h. 9 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 39.2853), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.46).

3.137 Three figures riding an elephant dropping coins behind them, (possibly telling the narrative of Udayana and Vasavdatta), Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 8 cm across, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 4405).

3.138 Elephant with three riders seated on an animal skin saddle, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 2/22347).

3.139 Elephant riding a chariot pulled by two others, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 2/23162).

3.140 Elephant on cart pulled by a man, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 7 x 8.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K 196), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.37).

3.141 Fragment of right half of a plaque with a princely child on an elephant cart pulled by a man (broken), with another prince. Both children have attendants. Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 8.5 x 10 cm, Private Collection, London.

3.142 Fragment of scene that shows two winged lions, attacking a man and his elephant, warded off by the hero. Ahichhatra, 1st century BC, 7.5 x 9 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (4697), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.14).

3.143 Fragment of scene that shows two winged lions, attacking a man and his elephant, warded off by the hero. Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Allahabad Municipal Museum (K 5328), Photo © AIIS (No. 202.70).

3.144 (a and b)Double moulded medallion with a boy opening the mouth of a lion or leogryph (? Bharata counting the teeth of the lion from the Shakuntalam?) on obverse, and a pair of alternating *shrivatsa* and *triratna* motifs on the reverse. Shahabad, Hardoi Dist., 1st – 2nd centuries AD, 9 x 9 cm, Dr. Jagdish Gupta Collection, Allahabad. Photo © AIIS (No. C2.51E and C2.52A).

3.145 Figure with a bow-harp seated on the shoulders of a pot bellied atlas. Mathura, 1st century BC, 12 x 7.5 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. 2436) Photo © AIIS (No. 202.67).

3.146 Moulded toy cart with four caparisoned horses, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Allahabad University Museum, © AIIS (No. 618.46)

3.147 Moulded toy cart with four caparisoned horses, Ahichhatra, 1st century BC, 10 x 11.3 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. Ah. 194), © AIIS (No. 9.64)

3.148 Moulded toy cart with a pair of yoked bulls, Kaushambi region, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (No. 3493).

3.149 Fragmentary toy-cart with a pair of yoked bulls and three riders, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 8.5 x 8 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. K5197), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.35)

3.150 (a and b) two views of moulded toy cart with six figures, Bhita, 1st century BC, 7.5 x 15.5 x 12 cm, Indian Museum Calcutta, © AAAUM / ACSAA (Nos. 11194 and 11193).

3.151 (a and b) Interior and exterior of two identical toy carts, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (a: No. 3491, and b: No. 3482).

3.152 Toy cart with male figure, moulded terracotta, Katra Keshav Deo, Mathura District, 1st century BC, l. 8 cm, Mathura Govt. Museum (No. 54.3799), Photo © AIIS (No. 355.47)

3.153 (a and b) Toy cart (and detail) with three passengers and earthen pots, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, Collection of Gurukul, Jhajjar.

3.154 *Makara* shaped push toy, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 5.5 x 20 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. K2650), Photo © AIIS (No. 9.66)

3.155 Push toy shaped like a composite winged male, Kaushambi, 1st century BC, 10 x 15 cm, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. K5080), Photo © AIIS (No. 10.83)

3.156 Turbaned female head, Buxar, 3rd century BC, 8 x 10 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6607).

3.157 turbaned female head, Buxar, 3rd century BC, 7.5 x 6.5 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6605).

3.158 Seated female figure, Buxar, 3rd century BC, h. 16 cm, Sitaram Upadhyay Museum, Buxar.

3.159 Seated female figure, Buxar, 3rd century BC, h. 15.5 cm, Sitaram Upadhyay Museum, Buxar.

3.160 Female bust wearing a cap, Buxar, 3rd century BC, h. 9 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6588).

3.161 Female head in a prominent bicornate-turban, Buxar, 3rd century BC, 5.5 x 7 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6299).

3.162 Seated female figure, Buxar, 3rd century BC, h. approx. 15 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6300).

3.163 Partly moulded female figure, Bulandibagh, 3rd century BC, h. 28.5 cm, Patna Museum (4177) [© AAAUM / ACSAA: 11112].

3.164 Moulded female plaque of lady with discs on headdress, 2nd century BC, 10.5 x 5 cm, Patna Museum (9408).

3.165 Standing female figure, partly moulded, Buxar, 3rd – 2nd century BC, 13 x 6 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6829).

3.166 Female bust with large medallion on headdress, moulded, Tilaura-Kot, 2nd century BC, National Museum, Kathmandu (No. 33b).

3.167 Moulded plaque of female with turban and medallions, Bulandibagh, 3rd – 2nd century BC, Patna Museum (No. 4200), [© AAAUM / ACSAA: 11121].

3.168 Moulded plaque of goddess on lotus enclosed in a tank, Tilaura-Kot, 2nd century BC, 12.5 x 8.5 cm, National Museum, Kathmandu (No. 7).

3.169 Moulded plaque of turbaned lady with bird, Tilaura-Kot, 2nd century BC, 17 x 8 cm, National Museum, Kathmandu (No. 34).

3.170 Fragmentary plaque of lady with bird, Tilaura-Kot, 2nd century BC, approx. 9 cm, Department of Archaeology, Kathmandu (Reg. No. 50).

3.171 Turbaned lady, moulded, Kumrahar, 2nd century BC, Site Museum, Kumrahar, Patna.

3.172 Mother and child moulded plaque, Tilaura-Kot, 2nd century BC, 11 x 8 cm, National Museum, Kathmandu (No. 32).

3.173 Moulded terracotta female swathed in fabric, Pataliputra, late 1st century BC, 12.5 x 7 cm, Patna Museum (No. 6782).

3.174 Moulded terracotta plaque of female swathed in fabric with high conical headdress, Bulandibagh, h. 13 cm, 1st century BC, Patna Museum (No. 7996), [© AAAUM / ACSAA: 11118].

3.175 Part-moulded-part modelled sculpture of jewelled female, Bulandibagh, 1st century BC, h. 15 cm, Patna Museum (No. 9473), [© AAAUM / ACSAA: 11120].

3.176 Side view of above), [© AAAUM / ACSAA: 11119].

3.177 Winged female figure, Vaishali, 2nd – 1st century BC, Patna Museum (No. 1787).

3.178 Turbaned and winged male figure, 2nd – 1st century BC, Kumrahar, Site Museum, Kumrahar, Patna.

3.179 Winged male figure standing on lotus, moulded, Vaishali, 2nd – 1st century BC, h. 14 cm, Patna Museum (No. 1773).

3.180 Elaborately adorned winged male figure holding lotus stalks, Middle Gangetic valley, 1st century BC, 10 x 8.5 cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.181 Detail of above.

3.182 Winged male figure probably from Middle Gangetic Valley, 1st century BC, 13.5 x 18 cm, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (1387).

3.183 *Mithuna* plaque, moulded, Vaishali, 2nd century BC, Patna Museum (No. 1540).

3.184 Repoussé gold plaque with *Mithuna* (?), Patna, (erstwhile Jalan collection) Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras (acc. No.)

3.185 Moulded plaque with an important male personage surrounded by worshipful females, 1st century BC, Buxar, 6 x 7.5 cm, Sitaram Upadhyay Museum, Buxar.

3.186 Bird faced hand-modelled mother goddess in dark grey clay, Tamluk 3rd to 2nd century BC, Purana Qila.

3.187 (a and b) front and reverse of partly moulded and partly modelled female figurine, Tamluk, 2nd century BC, 9 x 4¾ x 1½", Philadelphia Museum of Art: Stella Kramrisch Collection (No. 1994.148.294), Photo © The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

3.188 Enshrined goddess with ten Ayudhas and attendants, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 26.7 x 20 cm, Metropolitan Museum New York (1990.281).

3.189 Enshrined goddess on pedestal with sacred symbols and attendants. Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 49.5x25.4 cm, Private Collection, New York.

3.190 Fragment of plaque with goddess on *purnaghata* showering coins. Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 9.5x13cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta (No. 04.147).

3.191 Nimbate and enshrined goddess on a *ghata* in *varadamudra* flanked by attendants and a fish standard. Bengal, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, 10 ½ x 8".

3.192 Fragmentary plaque of enshrined goddess. Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 14x13.2cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta (No. 04.145).

3.193 Goddess with ten weapons, attendants and surrounded by birds and flowers. Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, h. 10 ½ (Spink & Son/Neumann Collection).

3.194 Goddess blessing her devotee, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, h. 5½", Private Collection, New York.

3.195 (a, b and c) 'The Oxford Plaque', Moulded goddess with five weapons and details. Tamluk, 1st century BC, h. 22cm, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (X 201).

3.196 Goddess with five weapons holding her left earring. Tamluk, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, h. 4.5cm, Collection of ASI, Purana Qila, Delhi (No. CAC 87.17/6).

3.197 Goddess with five ayudhas with a child, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Private collection, London.

3.198 Large wooden sculpture of goddess with four weapons, Bengal, 20x6 ¾" , 1st century BC, Private Collection, New York.

3.199 Large wooden *Yakshi*, 1st century BC, style of Chandraketugarh, Alexander Götz, London.

3.200 (a and b) Mould and imprint for plaque for goddess with ten weapons, Chandraketugarh, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta.

3.201 (a, b and c) Original mould imprint and detail of goddess and her attendant wearing a cockerel shaped conical cap. 1st century BC, style of Chandraketugarh, h. 23.2 cm, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (No. 93-35).

3.202 Goddess with ten ayudhas with an attendant carrying a tray of fruit and sweetmeat, Southern Bengal, 16 ¾ x 8 7/8", Private Collection, New York.

3.203 Feet of goddess on a drum like cushion and a squatting giant atlas, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, 13x19.9cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta (No. 04.149).

3.204 Grey terracotta goddess with a bird at her feet, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st – 2nd century AD, Spink & Son, London.

3.205 Winged female figure holding lotus, Tamluk, 1st century BC – 1st century AD, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.206 Bejewelled dancing female probably Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 6 ½ x 2 ½", Private Collection, New York.

3.207 Bejewelled dancing figure, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.208 Dancerly female with her hair dressed in braids and bejewelled tassels suspended from belt. Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century AD, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. (1999-47).

3.209 Fragment of goddess with five weapons dancing with her arms raised, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 5x6cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.210 (a and b) Pale grey terracotta female bust of a lady resting her head on her hand, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC –1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna, B: detail.

3.211 Female adjusting hairdo looking in to a mirror beside a large vessel. Bengal (?), 1st century BC –1st century AD, 6.5x4.5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.212 Chauri bearer, Lower Bengal, Kanoria Collection.

3.213 Turbaned female with a bow harp, Bengal, 1st century BC –1st century AD, h. 11cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.214 Mother and child, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC –1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.215 (A and B) front and reverse of hollow double moulded mother and child seated on a stool. Eastern India, 1st century BC, h. 12.5 cm, Private Collection, London.

3.216 Creamy beige plaque of goddess with lotus, with a large mushroom like hairdo. Bengal, 1st century BC –1st century AD, h. 13.5cm, Collection of Roger Monks, London.

3.217 Bust of female figurine with constriction in headdress, Chandraketugarh, Private Collection.

3.218 Moulded female plaque standing on a pedestal holding bud like ear ornament with mushroom like hairdo, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century AD, h.31", John Eskanazi, London.

3.219 Bust of female figurine with constriction in headdress, 1st century BC –1st century AD, h. 6.9cm, Hadipur - Chandraketugarh, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta (No. 91.1411)

3.220 Lady surrounded by lotus vine, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 8x8", Private Collection, New York.

3.221 Moulded plaque cut away from background and positioned on a pedestal. Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, h.9", Private Collection, New York.

3.222 Large modelled figurine with stamped and moulded appliqué jewellery. h. 9", style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Private Collection, New York.

3.223 Large modelled figurine with stamped and moulded appliqué jewellery and face. style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Private Collection, New York.

3.224 (A and B) front and reverse of large modelled figurine with stamped and moulded appliqué jewellery and face. style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Private Collection, New York.

3.225 Large modelled male figure with stamped and moulded appliqué jewellery. style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Private Collection, New York.

3.226 Moulded male figure probably holding lotus buds, Tamluk, 1st century BC, h. 5.5cm, ASI collection at Purana Qila, Delhi (No. CAC 87.17/40).

3.227 Bedecked male figure with parrot and leopard (?). style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Private Collection, New York.

3.228 Large striding male with consort and attendants (proto-Shiva?), style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. almost 5", Private collection, New York.

3.229 Male with trident riding horse. Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, h. 6.5 cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.230 Rider on chariot drawn by four caparisoned horses, Bengal, 1st century BC, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.231 Surya on a moulded terracotta roundel, Bengal, 2nd –3rd centuries AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.232 Heavily bejewelled winged male figure, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 3 ¼" x 3 ½", Private Collection, New York.

3.233 Winged male figure, Tamluk, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.234 Brooklyn photo Winged deity, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 9 ¾" x 5", The Brooklyn Museum (No. 1993.106.14) photo © The Brooklyn Museum.

3.235 (A and B) Royal male beneath parasol surrounded by female figures, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 3 ¼ x 3 ¾", The Kronos Collection, New York (B: detail).

3.236 Fragmentary plaque possibly from a narrative, Tamluk, 1st century BC, h.2.3cm, ASI collection at Purana Qila, Delhi (No. CAC 87.17/4).

3.237 Female head in a turban with beaded tassles, Tamluk, 1st century BC, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.238 Female head dressed in a large turban with beaded and jewelled segments, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.239 Figures riding an elephant, Hadipur-Chandraketugarh, 1st century AD, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta (No. 14. 10.93).

3.240 Fragment of plaque with elephant and riders, Tamluk, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 8cm, ASI collection at Purana Qila, Delhi (No. CAC 87.17/54).

3.241 Elephant and riders, Tamluk, 1st century BC, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.242 Regal rider with attendant carrying a banner (*dhvaja*), style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 4.5x5.5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.243 Fragmentary plaque showing the rear view of a farmer behind a fence, Tamluk, 1st century BC, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.244 Festive men carrying sugarcane bundles and a caparisoned elephant, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, h. 7cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.245 Ivory-comb handle with a festive procession, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 13.5x5cm, Private Collection, London.

3.246 Fragmentary plaque with masked elephant headed figures playing musical instruments and dancers, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Private Collection.

3.247 Fragmentary plaque with masked elephant headed figures, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, h. 7.5cm, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (No. 1997.16).

3.248 Fragmentary plaque with masked elephant headed figures playing musical instruments and dancers, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 2 7/8 x 3 7/8'"Private Collection.

3.249 Fragmentary plaque with masked elephant headed figures playing musical instruments and dancers, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 3 ½ x 3 ¾".

3.250 Enshrined tree with a female dancing to the music played by her male partner, Bengal, 1st century BC, 6.5 x 5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.251 *Mithuna* couple before a lotus vine, Bengal, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 3 ¼ x 3 ¼", Private Collection, New York.

3.252 *Mithuna* seated on a chair, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 5 ½ x 3 7/8", New York.

3.253 Pale creamy grey *Mithuna*, Southern Bengal (probably Tamluk), 1st century BC, h. 6cm, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (No. 1993.389).

3.254 Aerial view of couple kissing behind compound wall, Tamluk, 1st century BC, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.255 *Mithuna* before a chaitya shrine, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century AD, 14 ¾ x 10", Private Collection.

3.256 Bedecked *Mithuna*, child and a howling dog, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 32.5 x 26cm, The Metropolitan Museum, New York (1992.129).

3.257 Fragment of a male head with a projecting turban, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.258 Female with parrot, her hair built in to a high bouffant with floral bands and a drooping horn like feature, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 10 1/8 x 5 ½", Private Collection, New York.

3.259 Small robed chubby figure with curly hair holding a chain, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 10.2cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, No. 92.3.

3.260 *Maithuna* plaque, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 5.5 x 6cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.261 *Maithuna* plaque, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 5 x 4cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.262 *Maithuna* plaque set in an interior, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 6 x 7.5 cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.263 *Maithuna* plaque with lady surrounded by vessels, her girdle lifted, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, h. 9cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.264 *Maithuna* plaque, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 7h. 6.5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.265 *Maithuna* plaque, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 7 x 6cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.266 *Maithuna* plaque, Style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, 6 x 8.5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.267 *Maithuna* plaque, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, dia. 5.9cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, No. 04.417.

3.268 *Maithuna* plaque on a deep chair, Tamluk, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 8cm, ASI collection at Purana Qila, Delhi, No. CAC 87.17/55.

3.269 Six to eight figures involved in a *Maithuna* scene, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Private Collection.

3.270 *Maithuna* plaque, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 6 x 6cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.271 Female riding on the shoulders of a grotesque dwarf, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 7 x 5.5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.272 *Maithuna* scene involving a grotesque dwarf and a female with a ram's head, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 5.2 x 6.1cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, 04.418.

3.273 *Maithuna* showing fellatio, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 5 x 4.5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.274 *Maithuna* plaque showing fellatio, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 4.8 x 5.9cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, 04.487.

3.275 *Maithuna* showing fellatio, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 6 x5cm, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.276 Woman possibly giving birth to vegetation, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 6cm, Private Collection, London.

3.277 Boy with a push toy, Chandraketugarh, Private Collection, New York.

3.278 Elephant shaped toy cart, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.279 Elephant shaped toy cart, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.280 Peacock shaped push toy, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 11.3cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, No. 04.169.

3.281 Owl shaped push toy, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 11.5cm, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, No. 04.132.

3.282 Makara shaped push toy probably Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.283 Push toy shaped like a male figure with a bow harp supported by two atlantins, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.284 Toy cart with demonic pot-bellied figure, Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Bombay, No. L82.3/1.

3.285 A and B (Front and side) terracotta toy-cart with rearing winged deer, 1st century BC-1st century AD, 11.5 x 12.5 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art (No. 84.46).

3.286 photos A and B (Front and reverse) Double moulded hollow *Yaksha* shaped rattle, Bengal, 1st century BC-1st century AD, h. 10.2cm, Cleveland Museum of Art (No. 83.79).

3.287 Pot-bellied double moulded hollow *Yaksha* (possibly *Kubera*) Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC-1st century AD, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta, No. T136.

3.288 Pottery shard with applied moulded decoration, Tamluk, 1st century BC, West Bengal State Archaeological Museum, Calcutta.

3.289 (a and b) Pottery shard with applied moulded decoration, style of Chandraketugarh, 1st century BC, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.290 Globular jar with a band of applied moulded decoration of composite animals and mythical foliage, Chandraketugarh or Tamluk, 1st century BC, Private Collection, New York.

3.291 Pottery shard with moulded deity, Chandraketugarh or Tamluk, 1st century BC, 3 ½ x 2 ½", Private Collection, New York.

3.292 Man in front of barrel vaulted chaitya structure, Tamluk, 1st century BC, Tamluk Site Museum.

3.293 (a and b) Fragment showing addorsed charging horses crowning a bell shaped pillar capital, Southern Bengal, 1st century BC, Kanoria Collection, Patna.

3.294 Demi-lunar medallion with makara swallowing fish, inner face of railing, northwest quadrant Sanchi Stupa 2, *c.* 2nd century BC, buff sandstone, Photo© AIIS 228.83.

3.295 Railing pillar from Bodh-Gaya, sandstone, h. 135 cm, Bodh-Gaya Site Museum, No. 47, Photo © AIIS 65.67 (AAB).

3.296 Railing coping with *Kalpalata* yielding jackfruit and jewels with a *naravyala* (leogryph), Bharhut, 2nd century BC, Indian museum Calcutta (nos. 353, 354), Photo © AIIS483-54.

3.297 Railing coping with *vyala* emerging from *kalpalata* and *kalpalata* yeilding fruit, Bharhut, 2nd century BC, Indian Museum Calcutta (325, 326), Photo © AIIS 483.6.

3.298 (a, b and c) *Yakshinis* from Bharhut variously bejewelled, with different *vahanas*. Photo: after Coomaraswamy, 1956: pl. XIX.

3.299 *Amohini* relief, in a pose and with accoutrements reminiscent of early terracotta prototypes, 1st century AD, Lucknow Museum, h. 1.15 m, Photo: after Bacchofer, 1929: pl. 74.

3.300 (a and b) Fine granulated gold beads in the form of two triratnas and a central bead, 1st century BC, Cleveland Museum of Art, Photo: © The Cleveland Museum of Art.

3.301 The Kronos Earrings: gold twisted earrings with various zoomorphic and foliate motifs, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Photo © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

3.302 *Chandra Yakshi* on a railing pillar from Bharhut, Indian museum Calcutta.

3.303 Attendant with a *Garuda dhvaja*, Eastern gateway, railing 8, Bharhut, Indian Museum, Calcutta, Photo © AIIS 243.85.

3.304 Stupa worship, Bharhut, Freer gallery of Art, Washington DC, h. 47.5 cm, Photo © Lippe, 1970, pl.7.

3.305 Turbaned goddess with lotus, Sanchi Stupa 2, railing pillar north east side, mid 2nd century BC; Photo: © AIIS 239.55.

3.306 Fragment of a torana Architrave from Kaushambi,1st century BC, Buff sandstone, Allahabad Municipal Museum (No. 65) 26 x 1.4 m., Photo © AIIS A4.85

3.307 Railing pillar detail from Bodh-Gaya, Gajalakshmi, 1st century BC, Bodh-Gaya Archaeological Museum, No. 1370; Photo © AIIS- 513.99

3.308 Detail of third architrave, of the interior of verandah of Anantagumpha (cave 3, Khandagiri) Puri Dist, Orissa, *c.* 50 – 25 BC, with *Gajalakshmi.* Photo © AIIS 733.28.

3.309 Surya, railing pillar Bodh-Gaya, Museum Accession No. 1367. Photo © 296.19

3.310 (a and b) masked dancers, stone cup or mould 1st century BC, Allahabad Museum. Photo © AIIS.

3.311 (a and b) Figures on the railing pillars from Bharhut, a: Soldier? B: *sucilomo yakkha*; Photo © Coomaraswamy 1956: pl. XVII.

3.312 Sanchi, stupa 2.

3.313 *Mithuna* and *shalabhanjika* reliefs, Bharhut.

3.314 *Mithuna*, Sanchi stupa 2, northeast quadrant, pillar 1, Photo © AIIS 312-1

3.315 Amorous couple, railing pillar, Bodh-Gaya, 1st century BC, Site Museum, Bodh-Gaya, Photo © AIIS 296-26.

3.316 *Assamukhi yakkhini* with a child, ground balustrade, Sanchi Stupa 2, northwest side, mid 2nd century BC, Photo © AIIS 239-72.

3.317 *Gana* on railing pillar from Gurgaon, Haryana, 40 x 15 cm. Mathura Museum (no. 12-190), 1st century BC, red sandstone, Photo © AIIS 361.22

3.318 Other face of above.

3.319 Atlas supporting *torana*, Stupa 1, Sanchi.

3.320 *Ganas* on the stair-riser, entrance to the south face of Pitalkhora, Maharashtra, Photo © AIIS

3.321 The demons of Mara, Sanchi stupa 1.

EARLY INDIAN MOULDED TERRACOTTA

THE EMERGENCE OF AN ICONOGRAPHY AND VARIATIONS IN STYLE

Circa second century BC to first century AD

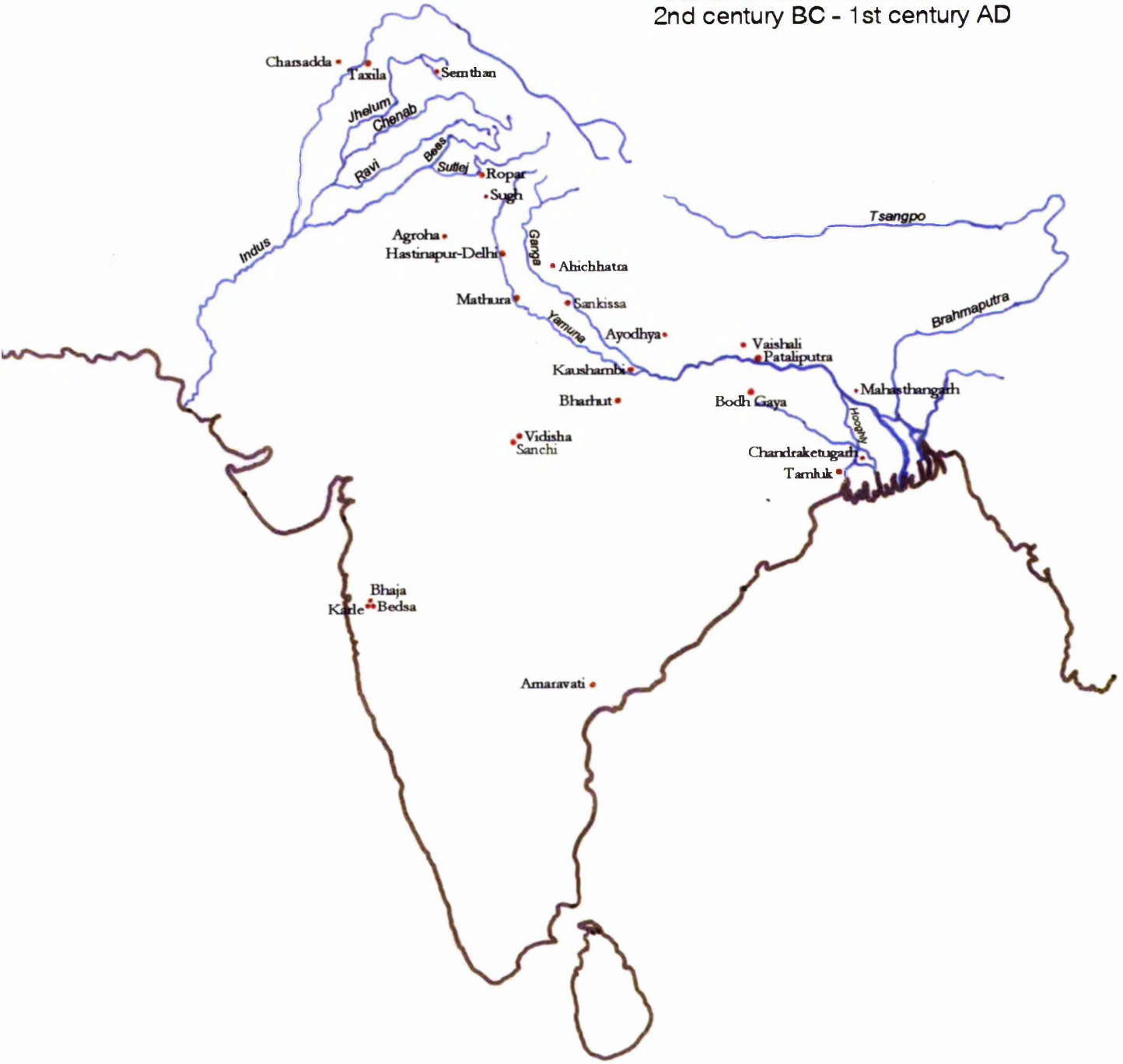
VOLUME 2

ILLUSTRATIONS

Naman Parmeshwar Ahuja
School of Oriental and African Studies, London University

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.
December, 2000

SOUTH ASIA: TERRACOTTA AND STONE ANTIQUITIES
2nd century BC - 1st century AD



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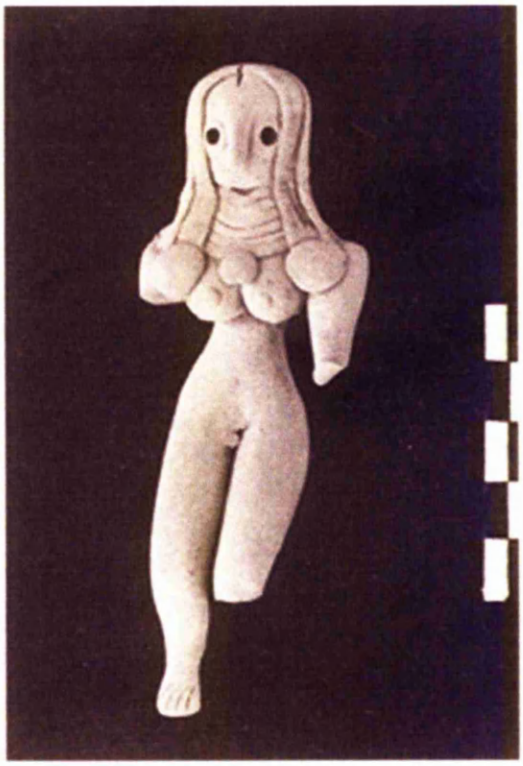

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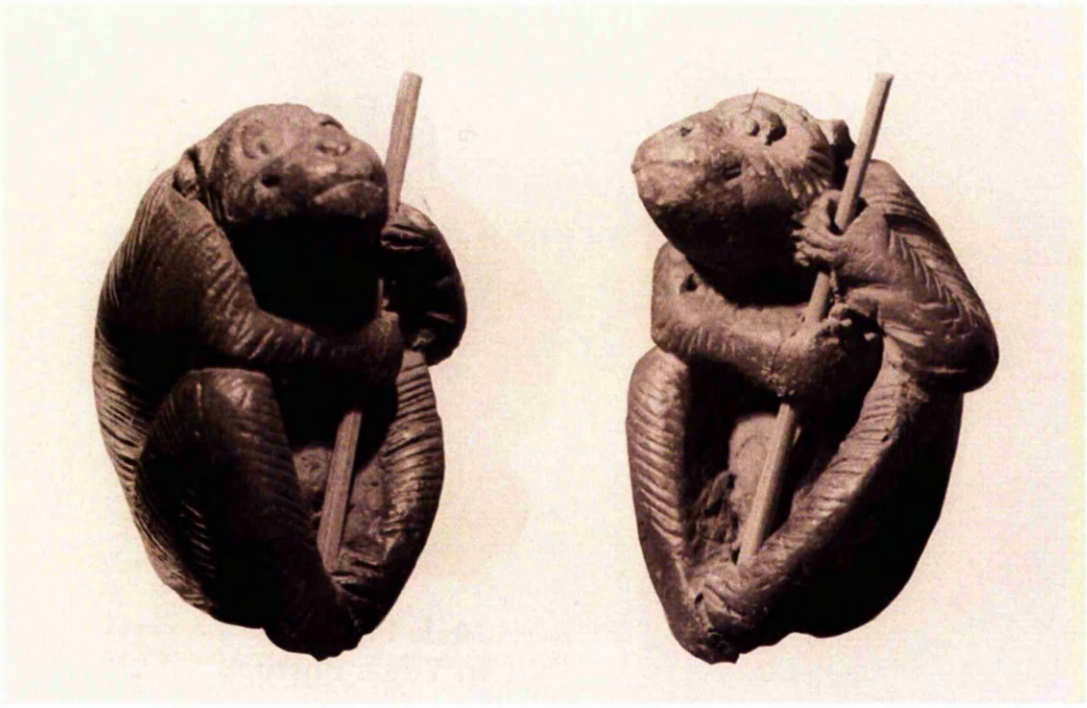

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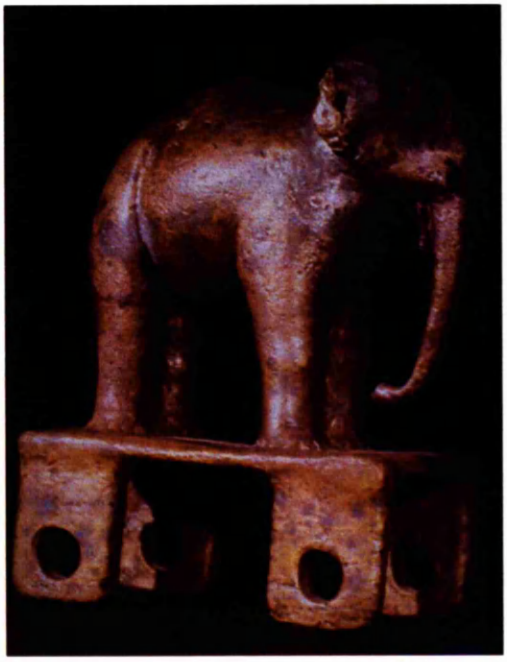

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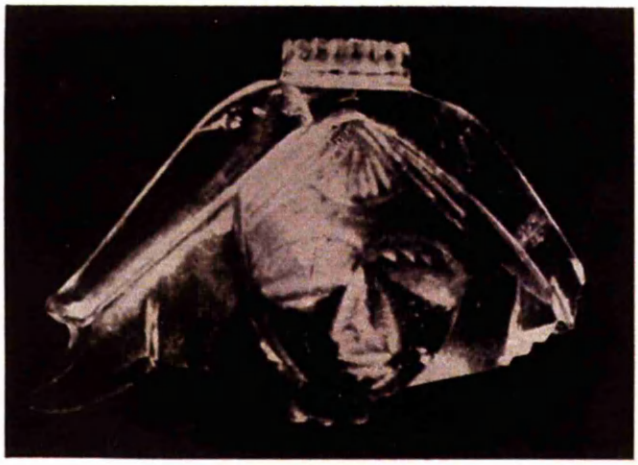

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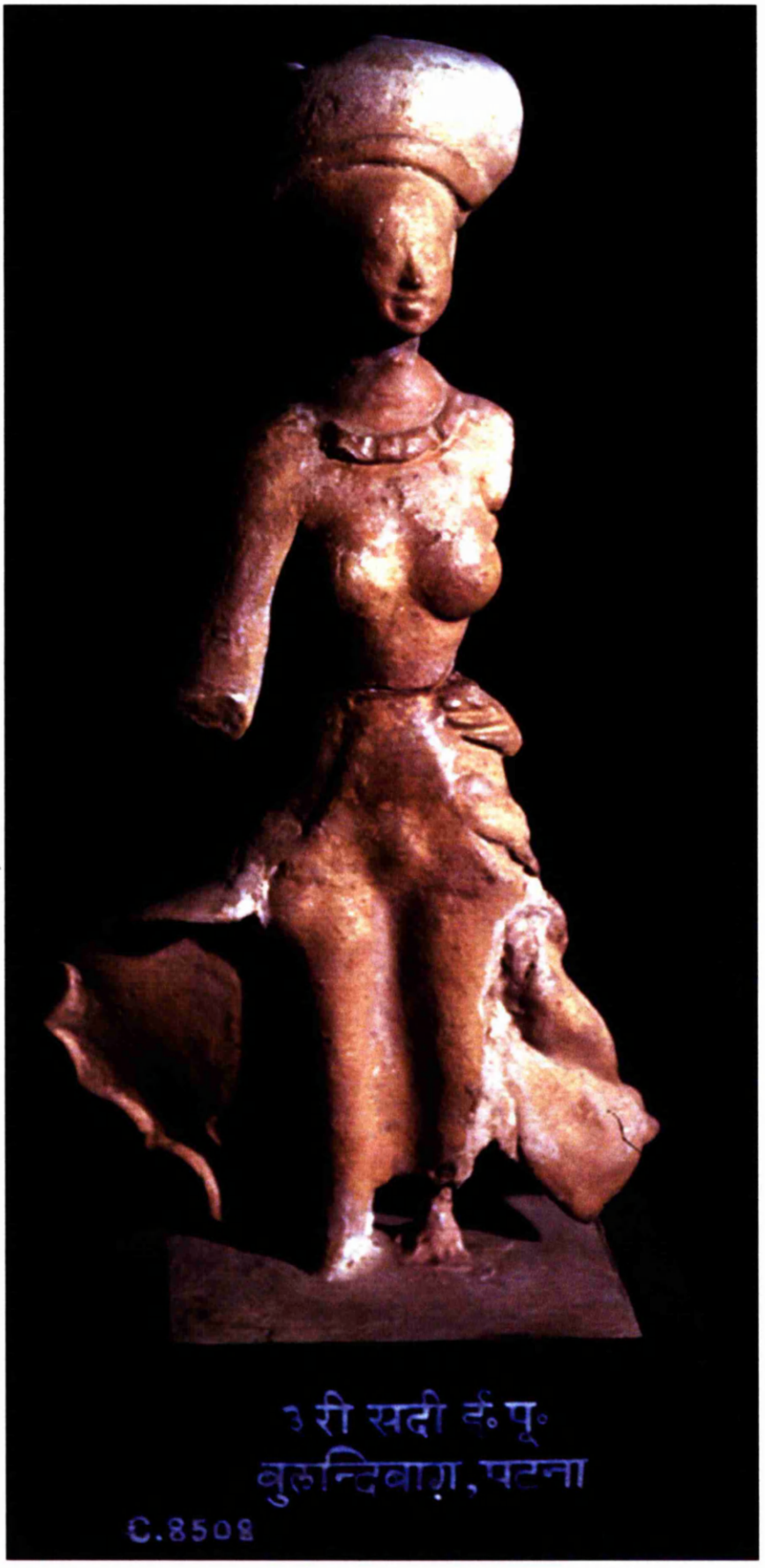
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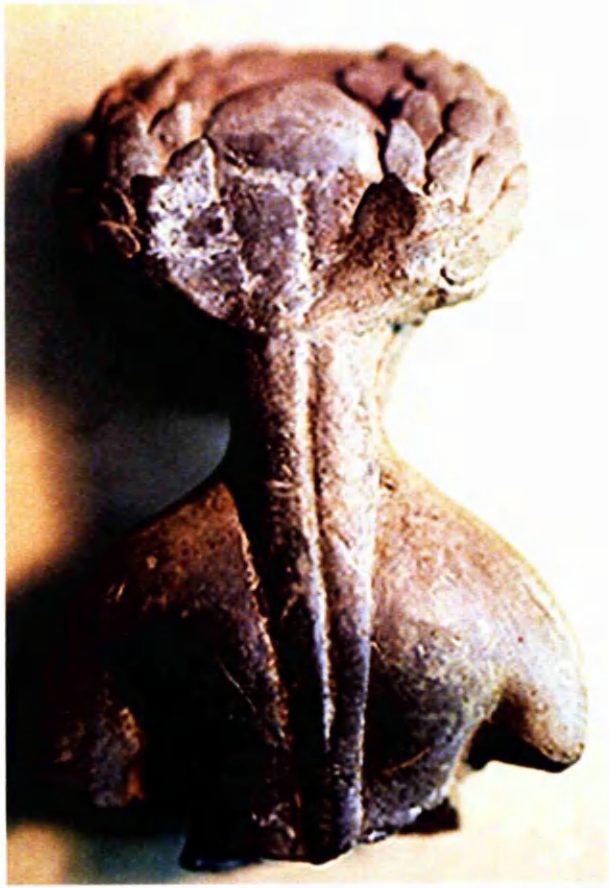

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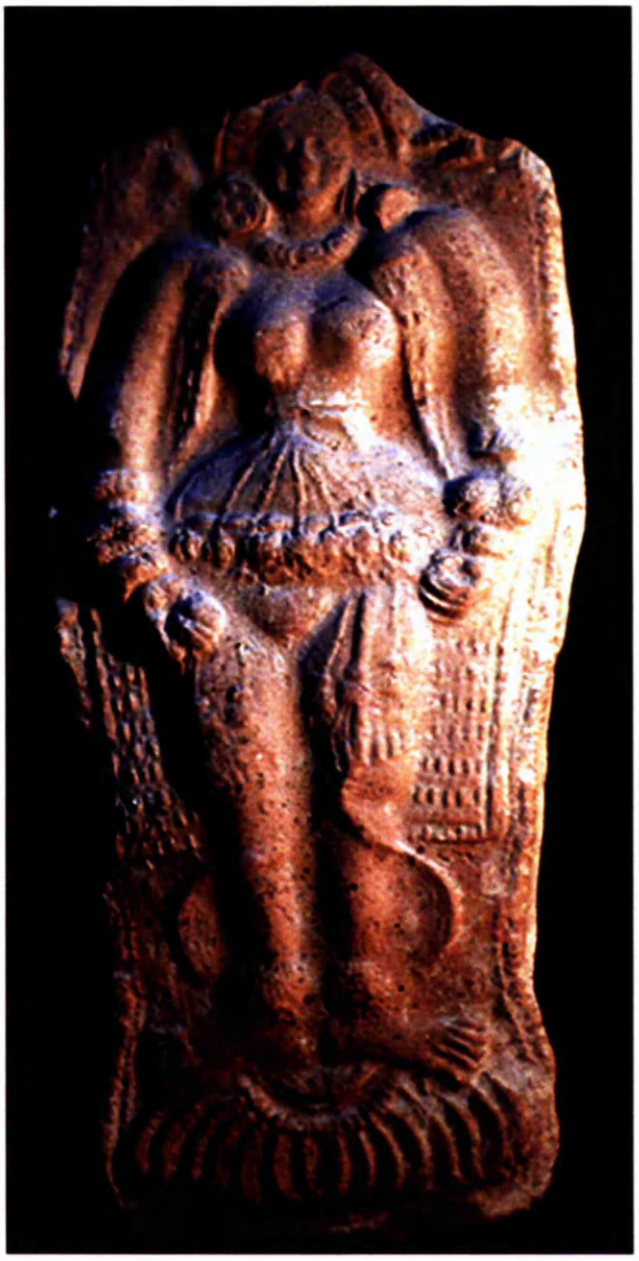

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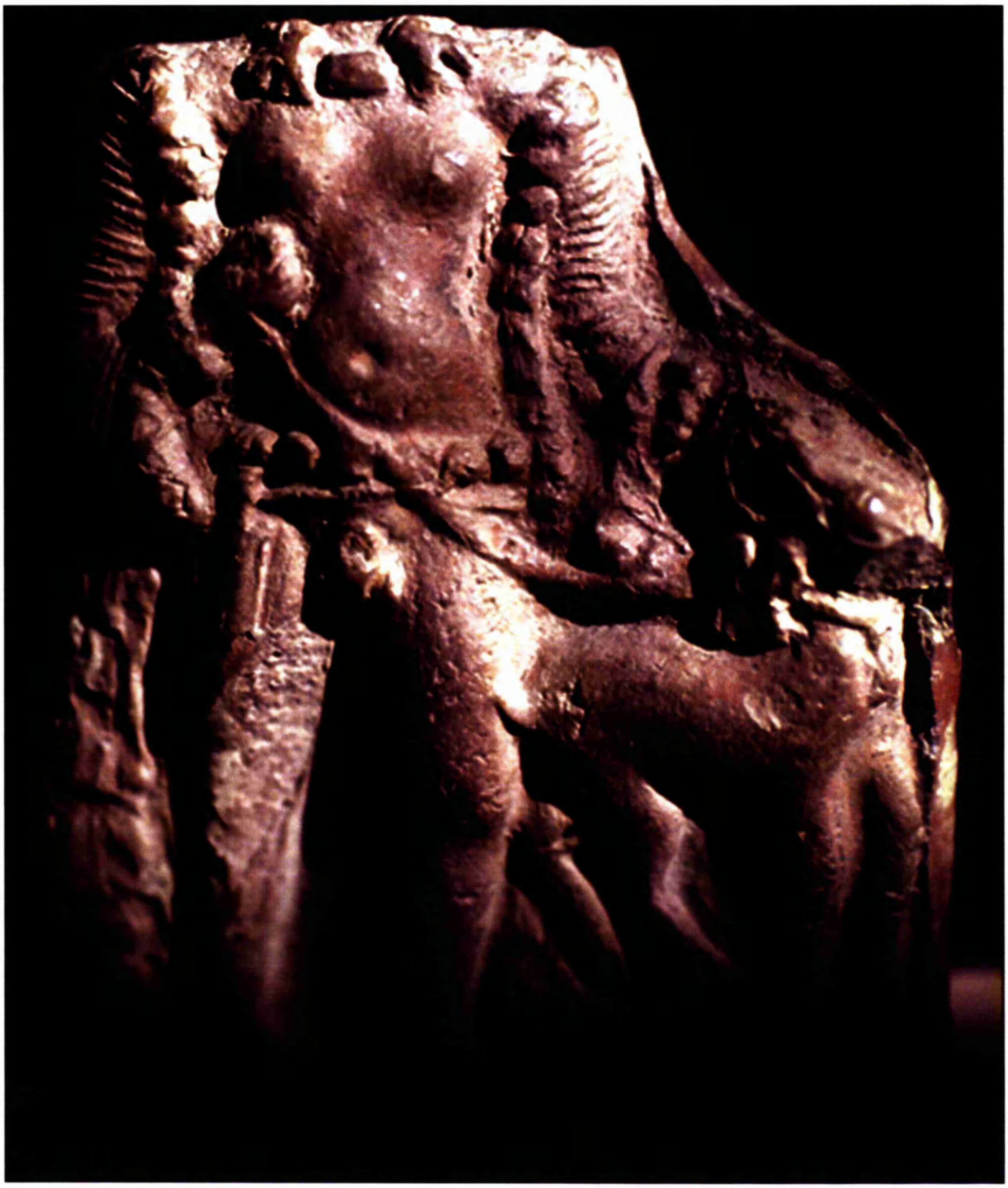

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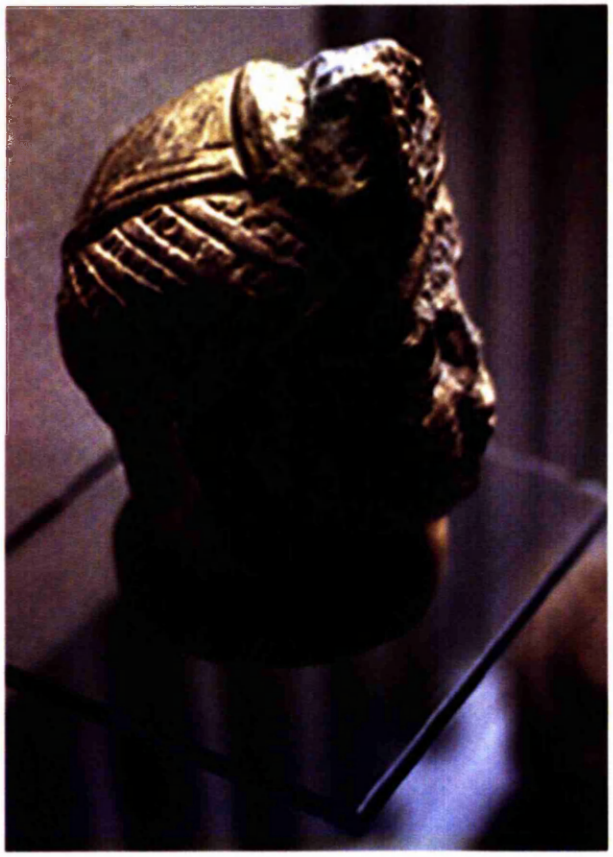

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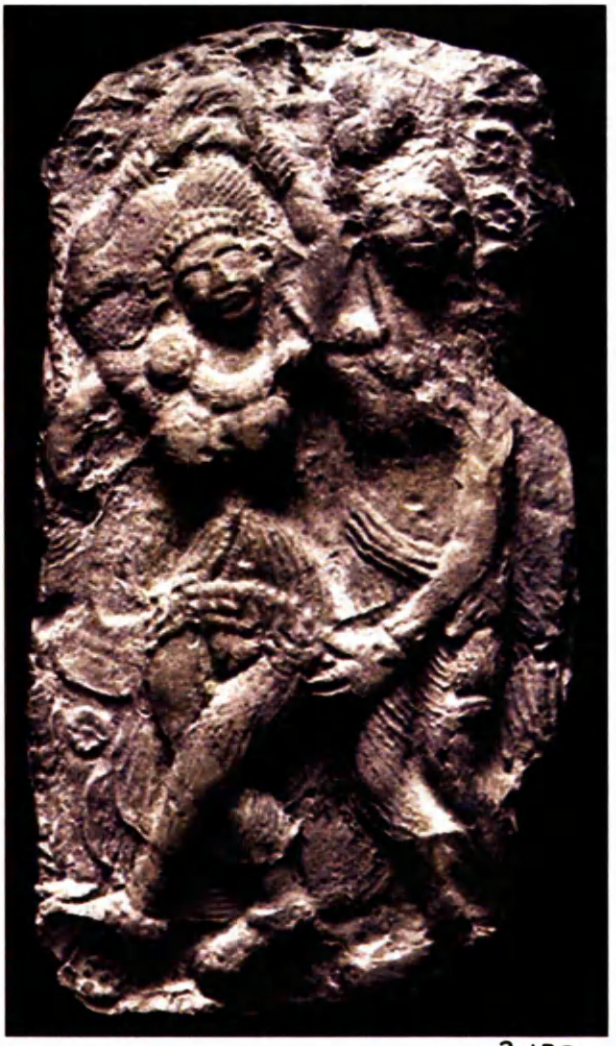

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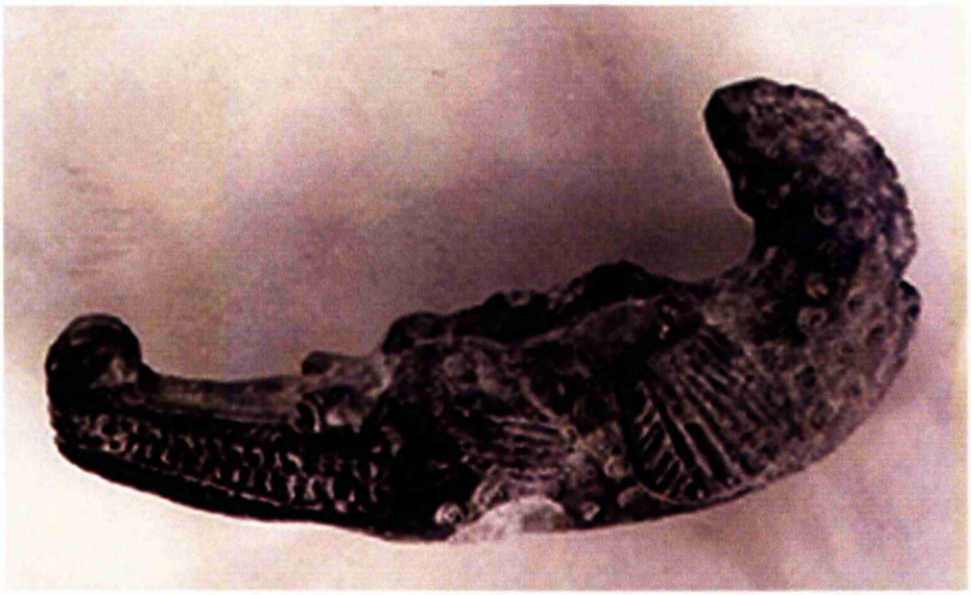

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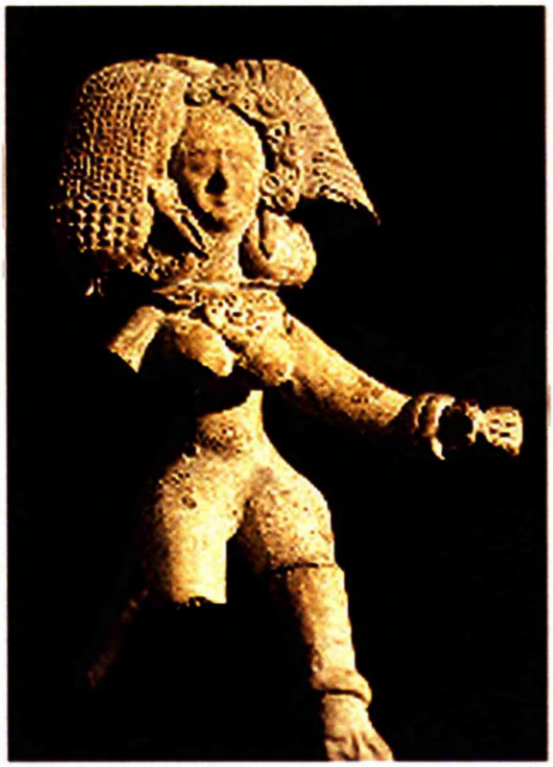

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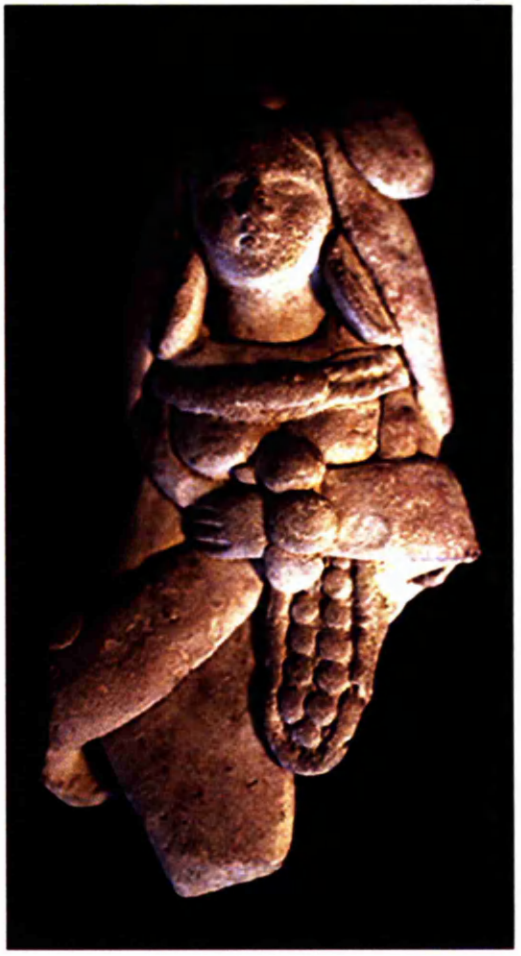

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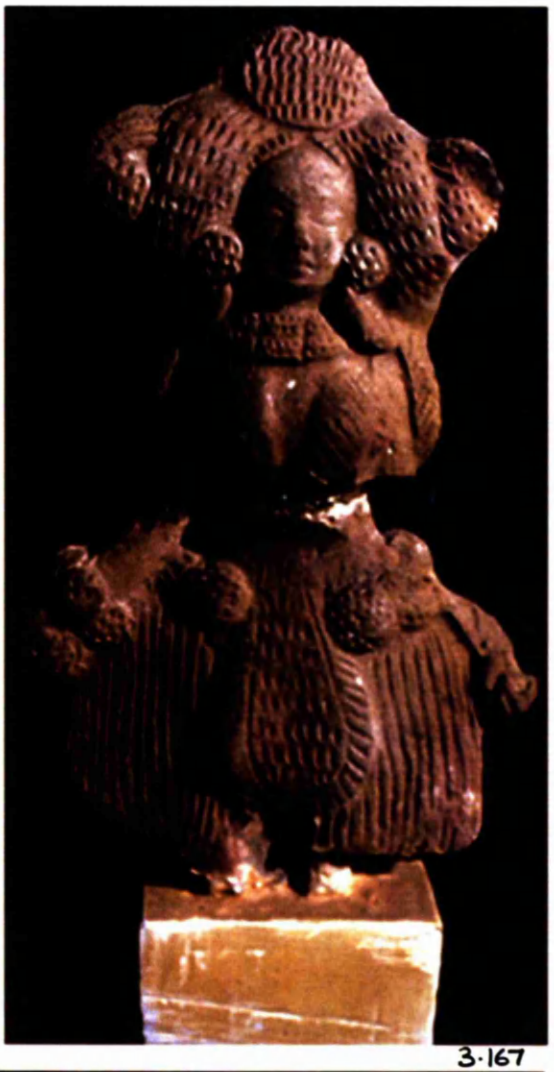

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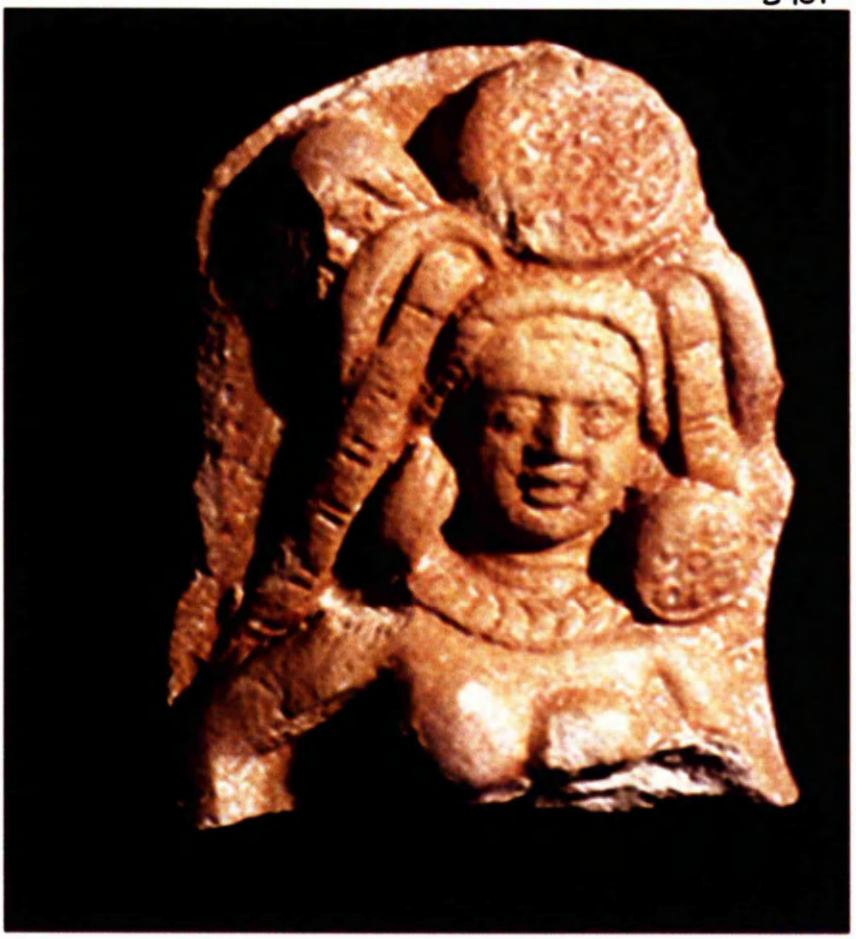

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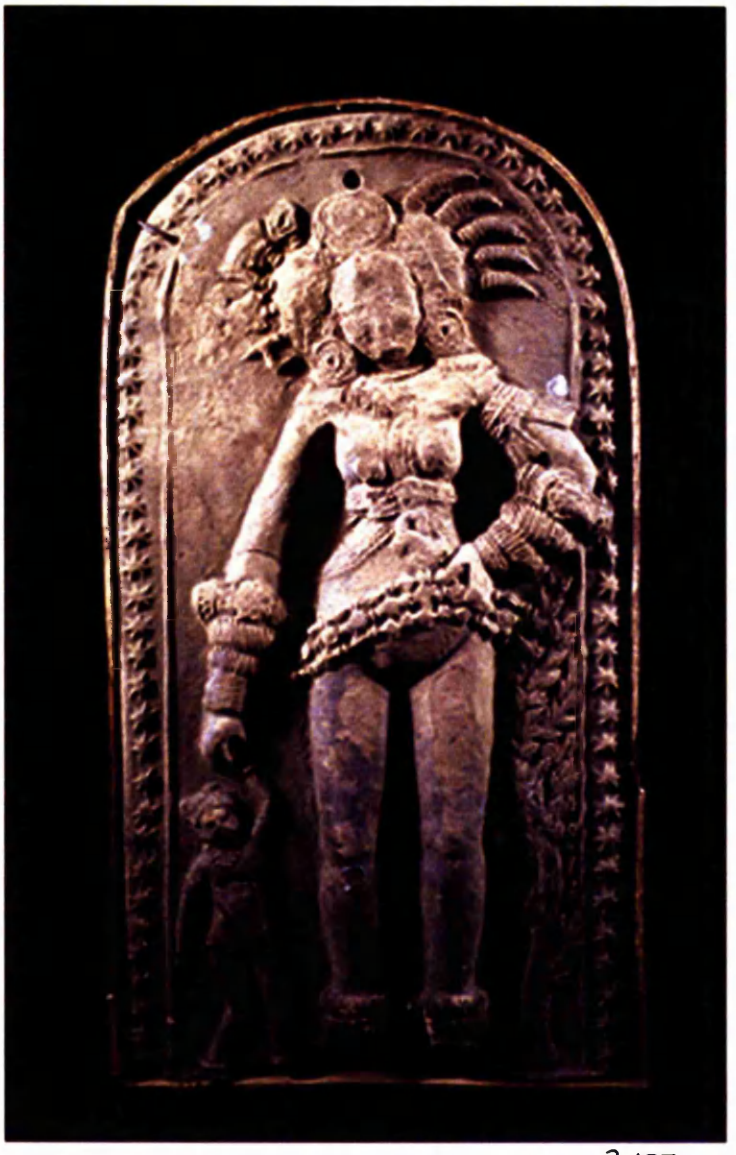

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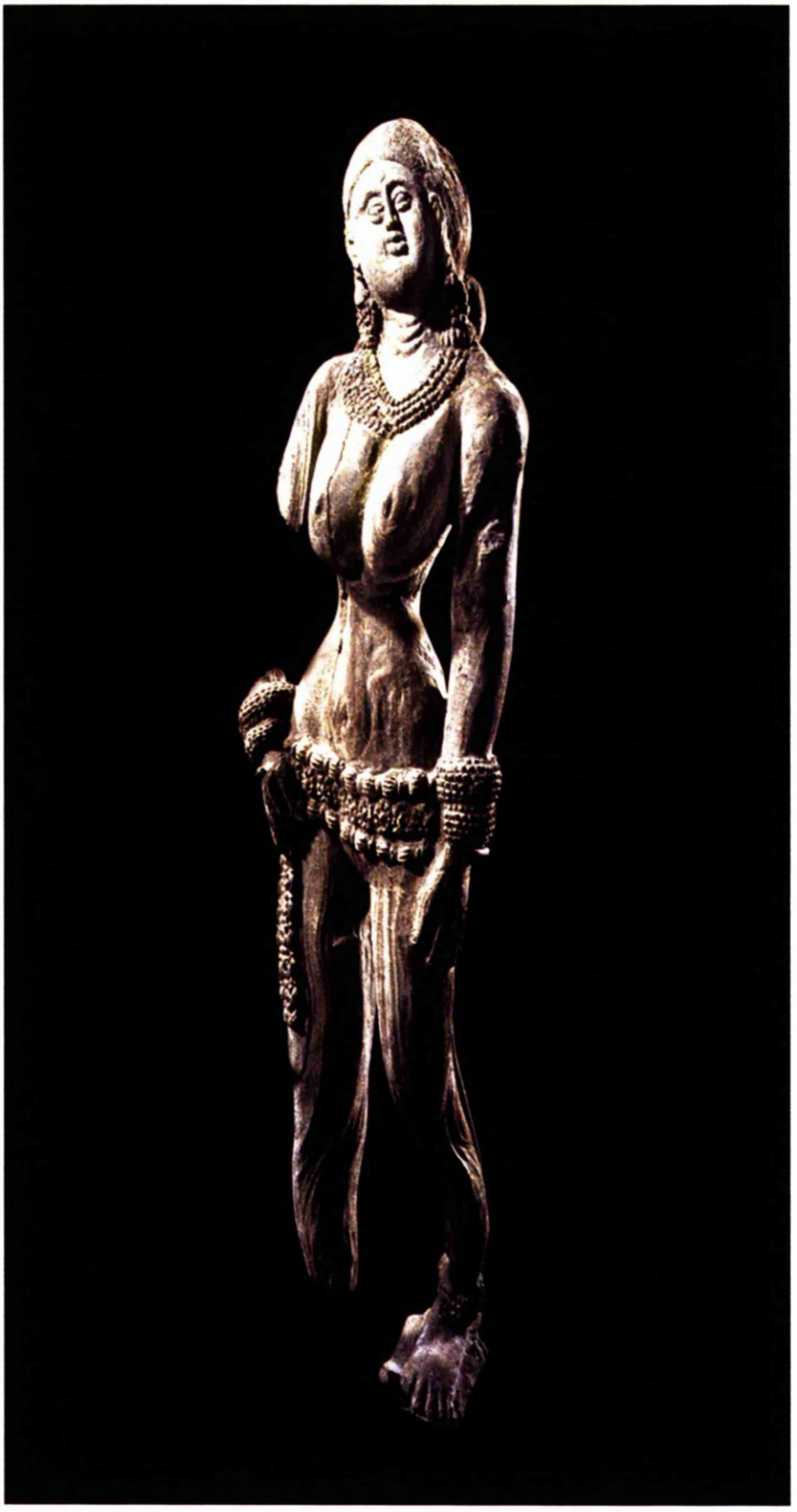

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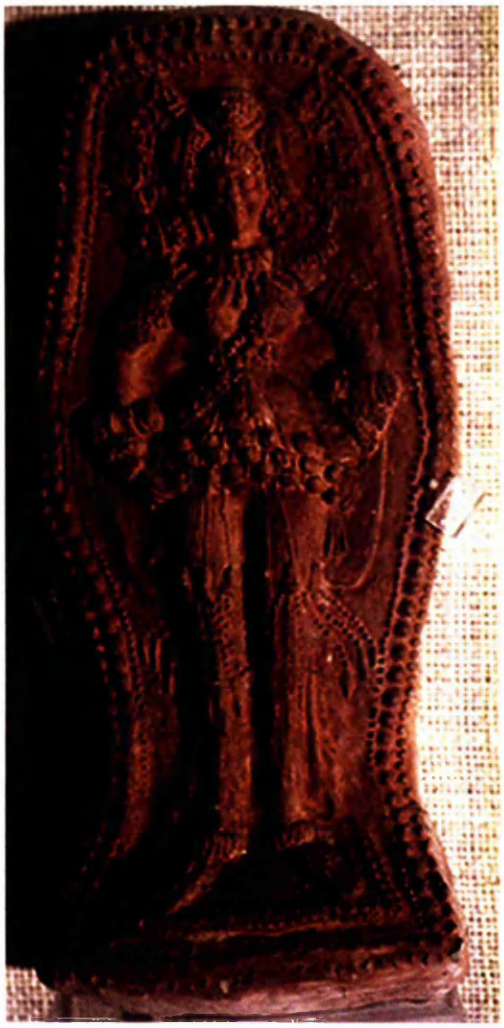

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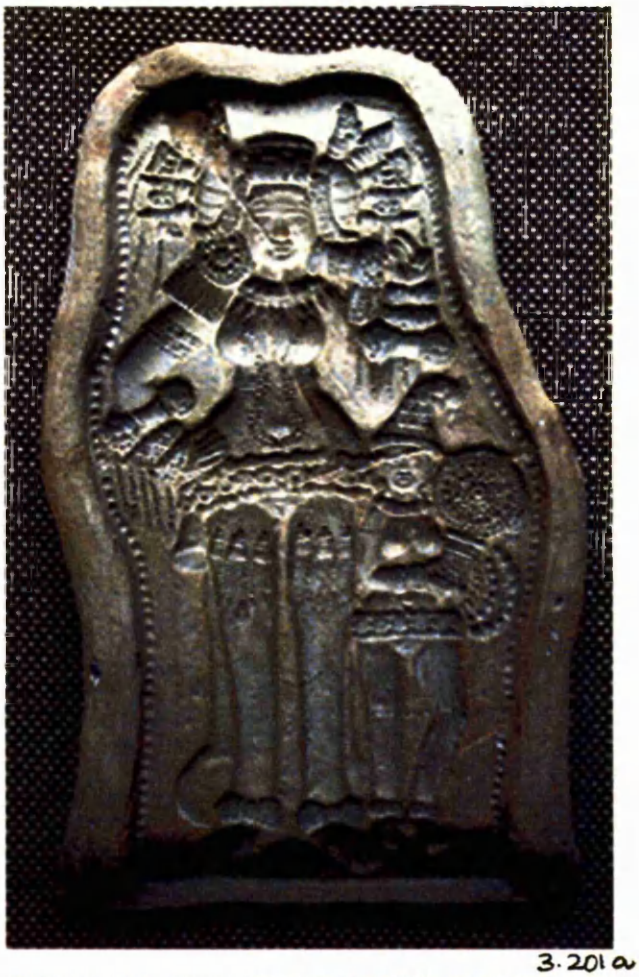

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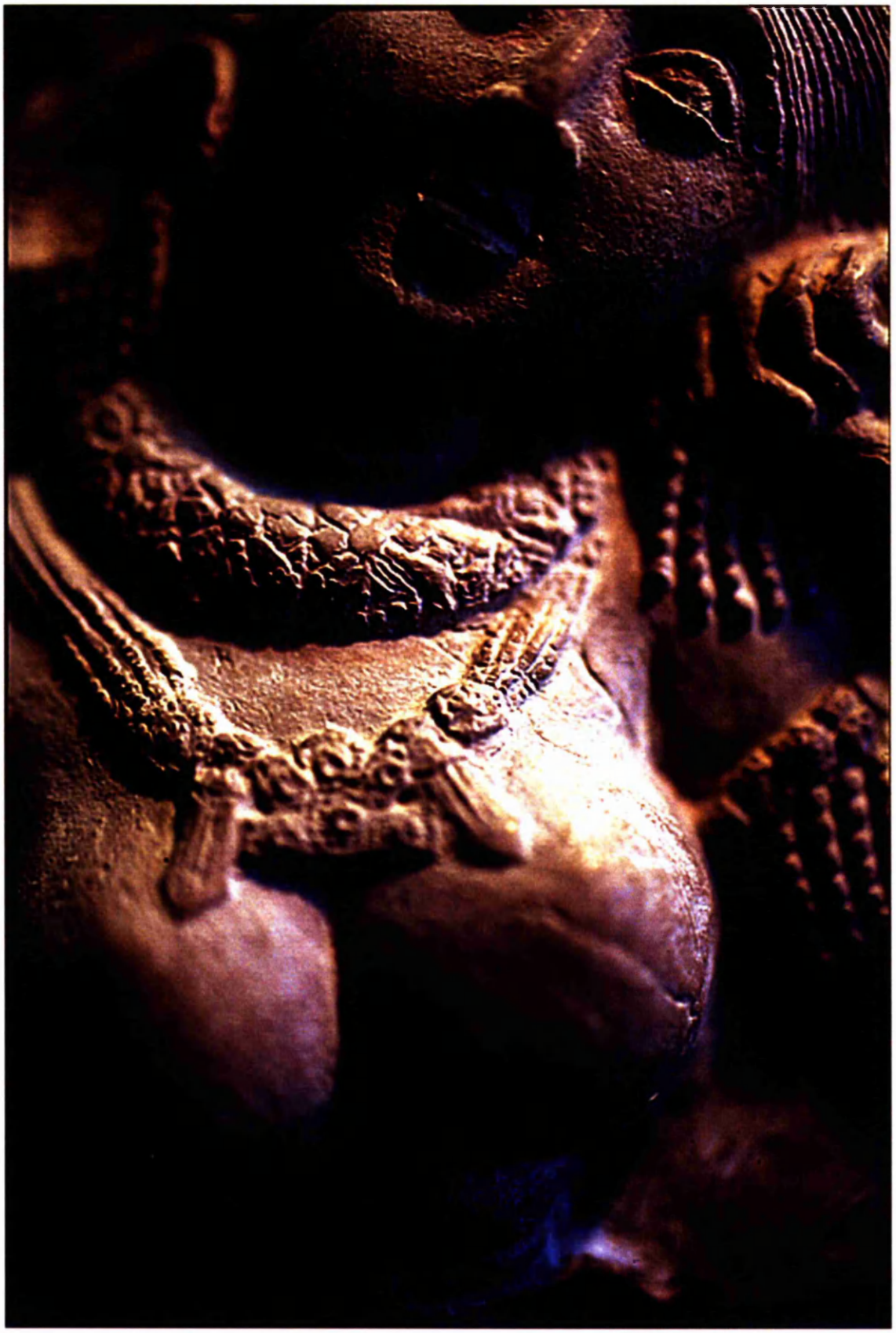

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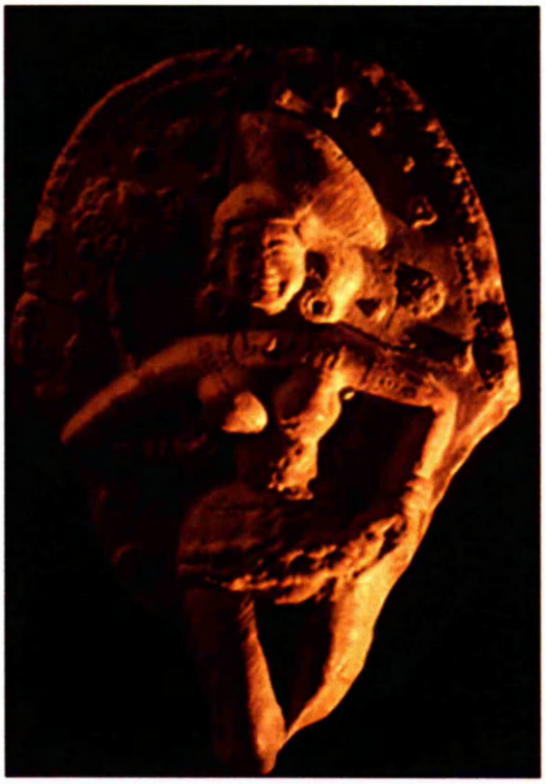

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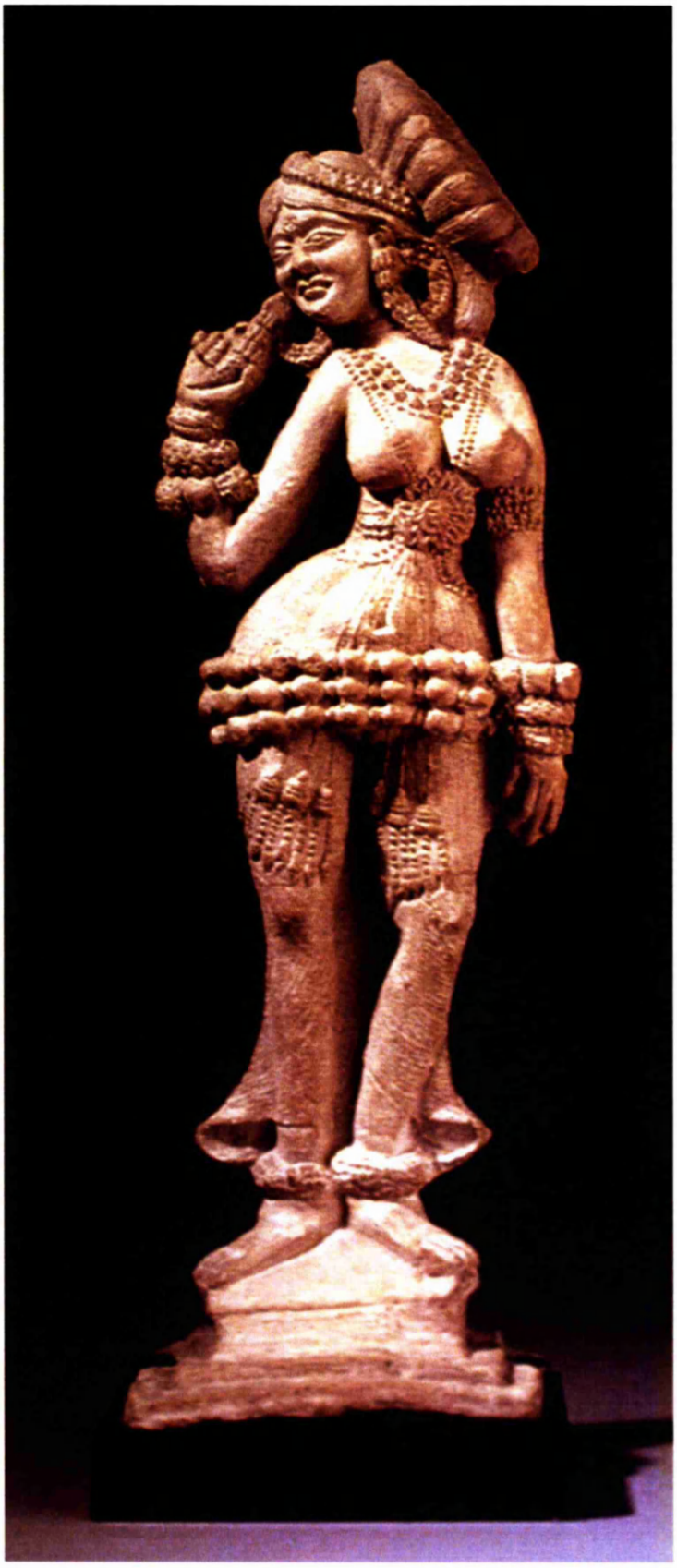

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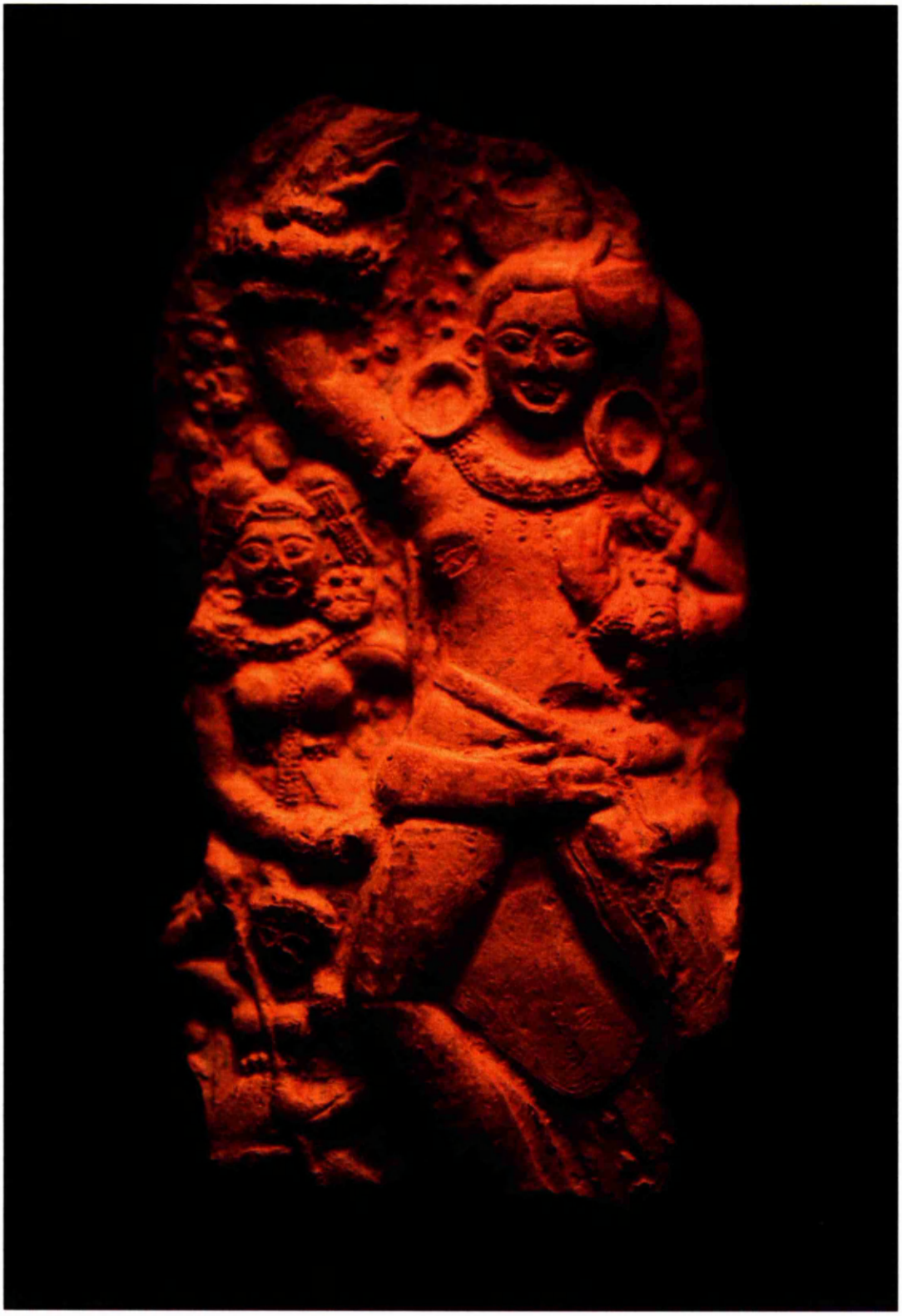

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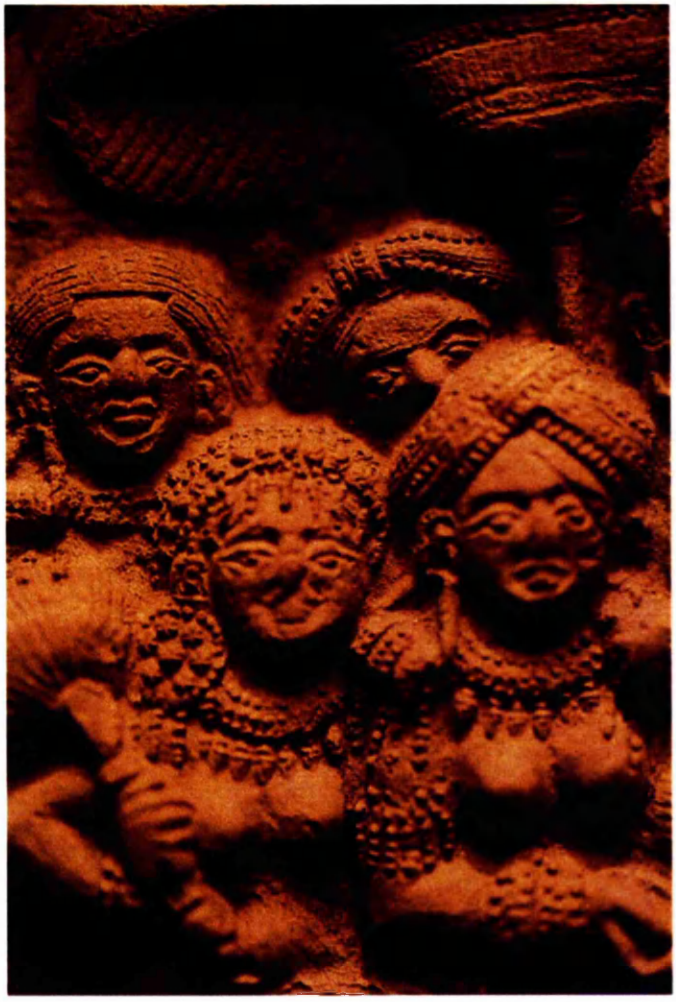

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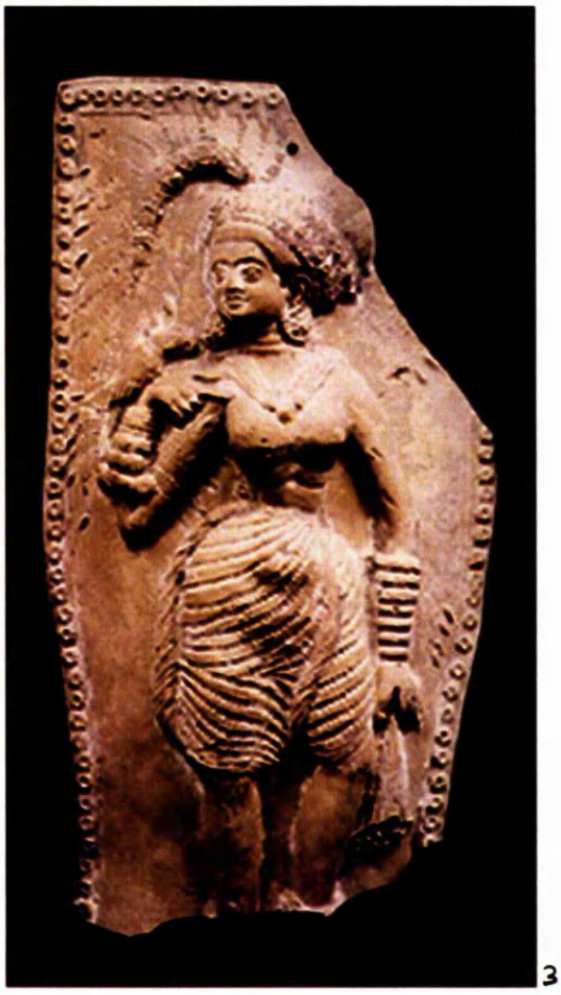

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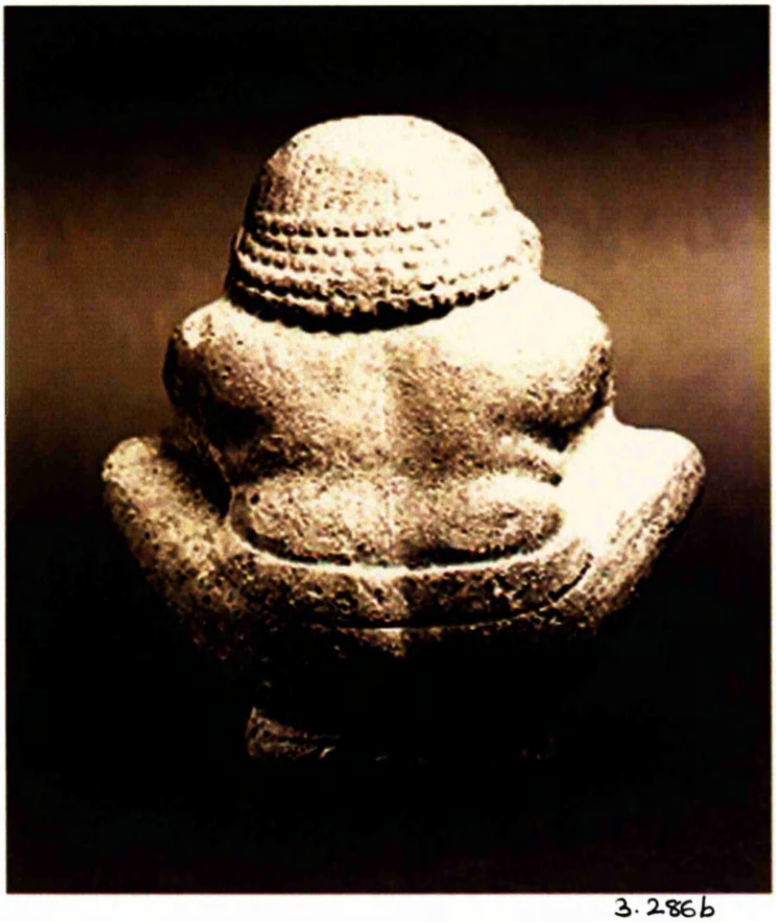

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